

THE ARGOSY.

JANUARY, 1884.

THE WHITE WITCH.

CHAPTER I.

AN INTRUDER.

THE afternoon sun was shining on a fair scene within the borders of Lancashire and on a knot of women, gathered outside their cottage doors to discuss some news.

"Going to be married again, Sarah Bennett! With his first wife not cold in her grave! Well, I should never have thought it of Mr. Mayne."

"There's no knowing what men will do till they are tried," returned Sarah Bennett. "And, after all, poor Mrs. Mayne has been dead nigh upon two years now, come to think of it, and he is a fine-looking man still, and the Abbey must be lonely with no lady in it."

They turned their eyes towards Croxham Abbey, which stood hard by; and Sarah Bennett continued:

"I'd not be sorry to see a mistress at the head of it again, if it was only to take down Mrs. Garner a bit. The airs that woman is beginning to put on! She was mild as new milk in her lady's time; but now it's all 'Highty-tighty,' and 'My good woman' when she speaks to you—as if she thought herself one of the gentlefolks."

"Well now, I don't see it quite in the same light, Mrs. Bennett," spoke up Hetty Stow, whose husband was first cousin to the parish clerk. "I heard all about it this morning from Mrs. Garner herself—and I must say I've always found her sociable and pleasant. It does seem hard, after she has been housekeeper at the Abbey so many years, that she should run the risk of being put out of her ways, and perhaps of losing her place for a new mistress. One would not say so much if it were a lady we'd all known: but a foreigner, picked up in France!—a papist, maybe, who can't speak English and has heathenish ways!—that is trying!"

"A foreigner!" cried another gossip in alarm. "Well, I'm not bigoted,

as everybody knows, but I've heard of those mixed marriages before, and I don't like them; they never answer. It will be an ill day for the Abbey and the village when Mr. Mayne brings home a Frenchified madam to take the place of the poor dear lady that's in heaven."

"I'm not altogether sure she's a foreigner, Ann Pym," said Mrs. Stow. "All I heard was that it was somewhere in foreign parts that Mr. Mayne met her."

"Well, to my mind, that's worse," said Mrs. Ann Pym, gloomily. "I've heard tell that the English folk who live in foreign parts is mostly those that have made their own country too hot to hold them."

"There's good and bad of all sorts, at home and abroad," said Sarah Bennett. "If none but the bad sort went journeying there, Mr. Mayne himself would have stayed at home. Anyway, we've missed him; he is as pleasant and kindhearted a gentleman as you could find in all the country round; and it's better he should come back with a French wife than that he shouldn't come back at all. He is ten times more sociable with us than Mr. Godfrey is."

"Mr. Godfrey's good and pleasant at heart, but he has not been like himself since his mother died. I wonder how he takes this news?"

"It is worse for him than anybody," cried Hetty Stow. "Mrs. Garner said he was quite beat down when he got the letter this morning. He had one letter from his father and she had another. He shut himself up—Why, there he is!—coming down the road!" she broke off, in excitement.

Sarah Bennett retired instinctively within her door. The other women drew together and watched the approaching figure stealthily.

It was that of a tall, slight young man, with high, square shoulders, a thin, fair face, the well-shaped nose somewhat long, a drooping, flaxen moustache, and but little expression generally in his deep-set grey eyes.

When he came to within twenty yards of the women, he opened a private gate, and disappeared from their sight between two high hedges and the clumps of lilac and laburnum trees, which were in bloom.

"He looks very *down*," whispered one of the watchers.

"He looks as black as thunder," added another.

"And enough to make him," commented Mrs. Bennett, emerging from her door, behind which she had peeped. "I wonder what he is going to the Vicarage for?"

"We did hear, me and Stow, that he was thought to be after one of the young ladies," said Stow's wife.

"Miss Elspeth is as pretty a little lass as one could wish to see," affirmed Sarah Bennett. "Did you hear which of the two young ladies it was, Mrs. Stow?"

"Well we fancied it must be Miss Matilda. She is the eldest, you know. It may not be either, after all; or he might change his mind."

With this brilliant remark, Mrs. Hetty Stow departed in the direction of her cottage, and the women dispersed.

In the meantime Godfrey Mayne made his way up the drive to the Vicarage, which stood some distance from the road in a large, oddly-shaped garden in which the Vicar drank in and thought out his sermons. The house was a plainly-built, ugly brick structure with a broad space of gravel in front, a small lawn on one side and a stable and outbuildings on the other. The Vicar's two youngest children, a dirty little boy in a disgraceful hat, and a girl a year or two older, fled among the shrubs at the visitor's approach. Mrs. Thornhill was at home, and in a few minutes Godfrey was sitting in the drawing-room in the presence of her and her two eldest daughters.

They were slim, fair, rather uninteresting-looking girls, inoffensively dressed and on the whole pleasant to look upon, as most healthy young Englishwomen are. They looked at Godfrey this afternoon with especial sympathy and interest. Mrs. Thornhill had entered upon the burning subject with very little delay.

"Is it really true that your father is about to marry again?"

"Worse than that—a thousand times worse," replied Godfrey. "He is married."

"Already!" said Mrs. Thornhill, shocked. "Are you sure?"

"Quite. I got a letter from him this morning saying that he was married two days ago at the Protestant church in Paris to a Mrs. Dixon; a widow whom he met at Nice a month or two ago, and knows nothing about, I feel sure. Can you understand a man's being so—so—taken in?"

"Hush, Godfrey; he is your father, remember. Perhaps she is really a very nice person, whom you will like yourself when you see her."

"Like a woman thrust into my mother's place!" cried poor Godfrey, his voice changing with excitement. "I should not like her if she were the nicest woman in the world; instead of some adventuress who has set herself out to entrap my poor simple-minded old father. Why, don't you see, she must have followed him? chased him from one end of France to the other? They would not journey together to Paris."

Mrs. Thornhill was silent.

"I've no doubt she thinks she has got a prize: a rich English widower, who can afford to travel about and enjoy himself, and who has a fine old country place at home, with nobody to interfere with her there, and no encumbrance in it save one son; a quiet, idle, harmless fellow, as I dare say my father described me——"

Elspeth laughed.

"Well, she may find herself mistaken," continued Godfrey, glancing at the young girl. "The Abbey is a gloomy old place in itself, getting somewhat dilapidated as to its decorations, and I will take care to improve upon that for my lady's reception. I'll have the old tattered chintz covers put upon the drawing-room furniture; I'll turn the pictures to the walls. I'll give all the servants a holiday the day they are expected to arrive, and I'll have all the school children up to romp

in the garden and tell them to pick what they like. She will wish herself back in France again."

Mrs. Thornhill listened to this outburst with a smile, which she tried to repress. "What a boy he is still!" she thought.

"I'm sure you do not mean what you say, Godfrey," she said to him in a gentle tone. "It would be a very cruel way of treating a lady who is coming here as a stranger; and who never meant to do you any harm, after all. When do you expect them?"

"They will be here on Saturday. I shall be out. I shall go to Liverpool. I have some very important matters to see to there, and Saturday will suit me better than any other day," said Godfrey, disagreeably.

Mrs. Thornhill did not quite believe that he meant to fulfil this threat, but she used all the persuasion in her power to induce him to receive his father and his father's new wife amicably, impressing upon him the fact that now the marriage was once performed nothing he might do or say could undo it, and his resentment would only tend to make his own position uncomfortable. He listened pretty patiently to her kindly lecturing, but as she followed him to the door when he rose to go, with a last entreaty to him to show Christian forbearance, he bent his head with a whisper.

"There is one comfort for me in this business. Some former husband of hers is sure to turn up and claim her before long. I know what these Continental widows are!"

And before the Vicar's wife had had time to recover from the shock of this most wicked speech, Godfrey had left her, with defiance in his face.

She went to her husband's study and told him all this. Mr. Thornhill considered that her pity for the young man was in part thrown away.

"He wants rousing," said the clergyman. "If the coming of this step-mother shall effect that, so much the better. What is he good for? What does he do? Nothing. His father ought not to allow him to lead this moping, lazy, useless life. Why, Godfrey must be five-and-twenty years old."

"I suppose he is: but he does not look it: he is very young for his age," said Mrs. Thornhill. "He did not expect this, you see; it has come upon him like a blow: without any warning."

"Yes, and I know what will happen: he will be sulky and stiff and ungracious with the new comer for a week; and then, not because he remembers that he is wrong, but because it is too much trouble to keep up the stiffness, he will drift into easy indolence again."

"Ah, it was a sad pity his mother died; it was that which took all the life out of Godfrey. He was so fond of her; he never cared to be roving away from her as other young men rove. Now I think that what he wants is a wife; he has quiet, domestic tastes——"

"To make a Darby to some Joan," interrupted the Vicar. "But he is not to be allowed to think that he has only to open his mouth for Matilda or Elspeth to drop into it, which I see is the idea you have in your mind. Any girl worth the having is worth the winning, and though our girls are not beauties or specially gifted in any way, they are good little lassies, worth the trouble of courting with a little more energy than Master Godfrey seems inclined to show."

Mrs. Thornhill listened submissively to this discourse, and remained firm in her opinion that what young Mr. Mayne wanted was a wife, and that he could not do better than look for one in her own garden of girls. She was not a match-maker: she held to the old-fashioned doctrine that love and marriage were things to be left in the hands of heaven; but Matilda was twenty-two and was already getting alarmed at the prospect of being an old maid, and Elspeth, who was nineteen and longing for more excitement than the quiet life of the Vicarage afforded, was madly anxious to be engaged before her elder sister. So that if Mr. Godfrey Mayne had concentrated his attentions upon either of the girls, he would have had little reason to fear that they would not be received.

Godfrey walked back to the Abbey moody and thoughtful, his mind filled with thoughts of vengeance against the scheming adventuress (as he assumed her to be) who had beguiled his father into marrying her. He pictured her to himself as he went along: a showy-looking woman very elaborately dressed, with an artificially good complexion and an artificially good manner, who would treat his father with indifference and himself with contempt. This fancy portrait of his step-mother worked his indignation up to a climax.

"I will never stay in the same house with her—and I am sure I will not be here to receive her. My father must say what he likes, but I cannot see the odious woman in my mother's place. How can he have been so taken in? The haste with which she has snapped him up might have put him on his guard—only that he is of the kindest and most unsuspecting nature. To-day is Wednesday: I'll betake myself to Liverpool between now and Saturday, and stay with Aunt Margaret for the present; or I'll go yachting with Mansfield or anything; and later my Uncle Abbotsford must find me a government post of some sort; but I won't come back here, and I won't see my step-mother."

He was not returning home by the front way, but went down a lane which led past the stables to the back gate of the Abbey garden.

Croxham Abbey was the most picturesque house for miles round. It was a large, long red-brick building, the roof of which was broken up by gables and turrets. It stood in a very retired situation, for the drive, which led between two hay-fields straight up to the front gates, joined, not the high road, but a shady avenue leading from the high road to Croxham Church, whose grey square tower was visible, between the trees, from the Abbey windows. Only a few small trees of yew,

laburnum, and lilac stood in front of the spacious garden ; but there were tall elms and beeches behind the house, and from the left side stretched a wood which covered some acres of ground, through which ran a rough cart-track, where the village children and the younger Thornhills came to hunt for the first snowdrops and later for the first violets. To the right of the house was the rose garden, whose oddly-shaped beds and winding paths were only separated from the hay-field beyond by an iron railing. This garden extended for some distance behind the house, where it was well grown with shrubs and tall trees, and ended in a wild, carelessly-kept plantation, in which the birds built their nests.

The Abbey had, years ago, been found too large for the family that then inhabited it, and part of the building at the back had been let off to a small farmer and land agent, named Wilding. In his descendant's possession it still remained ; just as the larger portion of the structure had passed from father to son in that of their more important neighbours. The Abbey greenhouse marked the boundary between the two gardens ; and clumps of shrubs and trees hid the farmyard from the Abbey side ; the greater part of the farm-buildings, together with the hay-stacks and straw-stacks, were at a little distance from the Abbey, on the other side of the lane at the back.

It would have been a desolate place enough now, but for the faint farmyard sounds and the voices of the farmer and his people calling to each other from time to time across the lane. Some years ago the Abbey itself had been less silent. Godfrey had then been the eldest of three children, who had romped in what remained of the old cloisters, and played at ghosts in the corridors and passages, declining to find the huge refectory, which had been formally assigned to them as a play-room, big enough for their battles and their games. But Charles, the youngest, destined for the navy, went to sea, and was drowned on his second voyage ; the girl, who came between them, Isabel, had married early, and was now in India with her husband. Godfrey, the heir, had no profession. When he came down from Oxford he found his mother ailing. Devotedly attached to her, he never left home again during the whole of her prolonged illness. With her death a blight settled on his life : so that at five-and-twenty, his present age, his youth seemed to be over : he had grown cynical, indifferent, and for all the active interest he took in existence he might have been older than his cheerful and active father.

When Godfrey had nearly reached the gate in the lane which opened into the plantation at the back of the Abbey, he was met by a thin lad of about twenty, who was leading a wretched-looking old horse by a bit of rope, and encouraging the animal to better speed by all sorts of strange gestures and cries. It was Dick Wilding, the farmer's youngest son ; a poor, harmless, half-witted lad, with no ill-feeling against anyone in the world, save Godfrey Mayne. When both families were children, Dick had conceived a dog-like affection

for Charlie, the younger. When the latter went away to sea, Dick was heartbroken; and later, when the news came of his death, his poor brain fixed the blame of it on Godfrey; who had sometimes been impatient with the senseless child, and laughed at his brother's strong liking for him. Years had elapsed since Charlie was drowned, but in Dick's mind the remembrance of the trouble never faded, and his hatred of Godfrey was unabated. Sometimes he would mutter that he was his "enemy," sometimes that he was "the devil."

He burst out laughing now as he watched the young man coming along the lane. Godfrey did not look at him, but passed by with his eyes still on the ground. However, Dick was in a perverse mood and would not let him go quietly.

"Ho, ho, the Abbey will be a gay place now," he called out; discerning, with surprising adroitness, a new way to irritate the man he disliked, having caught up an idea from the gossip he had that day listened to. "You will be having a fine time of it, Master Godfrey, with the new madam about the place. I wish you joy, Master Godfrey; I wish you joy."

Godfrey turned round angrily. "Hold your tongue, Dick, or I'll have you sent away for a chattering fool."

"Ha, ha! If I was a fool you'd not mind, Master Godfrey. I'm no fool; I know what I'm saying. You can't send me away like Master Charlie. Ah, and I know more about him than you do: I'm no fool."

He went on more quietly, shaking his head and repeating this and similar words, while Godfrey, ashamed of having lost his temper with the half-witted lad, walked on to the gate, through which he passed into the plantation. But his irritation had not been improved by the encounter with Dick.

"I wonder who has been talking to him?" thought he, as he crossed the rose-garden. "Very ridiculous of them!"

It was about six o'clock, getting towards dinner-time. The flowers about him smelt so sweet, the hay-fields and the trees beyond looked so pretty in the declining sun, that Godfrey forgot his ill-temper, stopped to look at one of the early budding roses and to give a glance about him.

"That rose tree would never have been allowed to straggle about like this two years ago," said he to himself, looking at a gloire-de-Dijon which had broken away from the nails that had fastened it to the drawing-room wall.

It had been a favourite flower of his mother's, and Godfrey took out his pocket-knife and cut off one of the half-blown blossoms.

"I wish I could cut them all off and carry them away with me before Saturday!" he cried aloud, in a wringing accent of pain.

He could not bear the thought of this strange woman's coming to enjoy the flowers that his mother had trained and loved. He wished, now that it was all too late, that he had accepted his father's proposi-

tion that he should go abroad with him, "for a change." This miserable trouble might not have happened. But he had not.

Shutting up his knife again, the rose still in his hand, he vaulted into the drawing-room through the open French window. There seemed to be more light than usual in the not much used room. The blind of the other window was up, letting in the afternoon sun upon the carpet and the somewhat old-fashioned furniture. But it was not the light that made Godfrey stop short in the middle of the room, dumb with surprise and something more.

Standing at a table, a book of photographs in her hand, was a lady in a plain grey stuff travelling dress. She turned with a start towards the window by which Godfrey made his abrupt entrance; then, as he stood still in silent astonishment, she came towards him with a rather hesitating but gracious manner.

"You are Godfrey, I am sure. I am your father's wife. We have taken you rather by surprise, but—you will shake hands?"

Godfrey took her outstretched hand, but his own was trembling. He understood the reason now, or one of the reasons, for his father's marriage, and he already himself half forgave the act. For at the moment of his first look into the grave, gentle face of the lady before him, he had recognised an undefinable likeness to his dead mother:—which had, in truth, first attracted Mr. Mayne's attention to her. The resemblance was not strong enough to be very marked: but it was enough to break down Godfrey's angry prejudice. She was not very young, and she did not try to hide the fact; her figure was mature, her fair, rather plump face had lost its bloom; she was a sweet-faced, gentle-mannered lady of two or three-and-forty. He began to apologise for his abrupt entrance.

"It is we who ought to apologise," said she, smiling. "It was very hot in Paris, and your father began to sigh for the country; so we crossed last night and came on at once. I believe my husband wished to avoid any demonstration by coming unexpectedly," she concluded, rather nervously.

"Where is my father?" asked Godfrey.

"I believe he has gone to look for you," she replied, her manner becoming hesitating again. "I think he was afraid—we were both afraid—you would be angry at his marriage. I am very grateful to you for receiving me so kindly."

Godfrey was disarmed. "How could I do otherwise?" he rejoined, kindly and courteously.

And before Mr. Mayne found his way back to the drawing-room where he had left his wife, Godfrey had given to his step-mother the half-blown bud from his mother's rose-tree.

CHAPTER II.

MAKING WAY.

THE second Mrs. Mayne, in spite of the prejudice which rose against her before her arrival, took favour by storm in her new home. Each one of her husband's acquaintances who called upon her, every villager who met her, liked the gentle lady with the sweet voice and gracious manner, who was always the same, whom no gust of ill-temper, no outbreak of impatience ever disturbed. She was quite an ideal wife to Mr. Mayne; who, although a man of kindly disposition and fairly good temper, was sometimes moved by gout and minor evils to fits of irritability, which she bore with a placid, smiling patience that disarmed him. Submissive was she to every look and word of her new lord and master, studying his pleasure with a serene devotion which quickly established her hold over his heart and mind; a hold that even the suspicious Godfrey never dreamed of attributing to any but the most innocent motives. Neither was her treatment of himself that of a crafty and designing woman.

In the first days Godfrey, drawn towards her by her likeness to his dead mother, had shown a disposition to linger about her, to wait upon her, to do her bidding dutifully; in fact, to let her take the place to him in trifles, as she had done to his father, of the late Mrs. Mayne. But she was too unexact for that. She seemed to forget herself totally in consideration for them. Not that she paid great attention to Godfrey: she was too much absorbed in making herself indispensable to his father. She saw that perfect care was given by the servants to their young master's comforts—which Mrs. Garner, hitherto so efficient, inwardly resented as needless. "As if she could not trust me," thought the housekeeper, "that she should say please see to this, and see to that!" Mrs. Mayne would study Godfrey's tastes when ordering dinner; if he were caught in a bad storm of rain, she would ring to say that dry clothes should be laid out for him; and she never used the carriage without first enquiring whether he wanted the horses.

But Godfrey's little devotional services she did not need at all. She had no trifling errands on which to send him; no particular preference for any one flower over another, and was quite content with the regulation bouquets, consisting of the blossoms which could be best spared, sent in by the gardener. She never made lists of the books she wanted from the library, because she never felt a desire to read any particular book, but took up any that might be lying about, and never knew which volume she was "in."

She somewhat scandalised the better-informed among the guests at a dull dinner-party given in her honour, by naming Alfred de Musset as her favourite poet. But upon questioning her on the subject next day with some interest and curiosity, Godfrey found she had mentioned

that unorthodox writer merely because she had heard French poetry was better than English, and de Musset was the only French poet whose works she had read—having read two of his sonnets.

The poor of the neighbourhood took to her. She did not offer to go district visiting, but she learnt and remembered the names of all, and her kind smile was ready for them. She took a class at the Sunday school one afternoon in the absence of its regular teacher; this was considered a great condescension in the mistress of the Abbey, and much increased her popularity; although she proved quite curiously incompetent as a teacher, and showed a naïve ignorance of theology in general.

Only one dissentient voice interrupted the general chorus of approval of the new-comer: it was that of Matilda Thornhill, who bore a family reputation of being sharp of tongue.

"I don't quite understand why we should all be called upon to fall down and worship Mrs. Mayne," Matilda complained one day, when the family had assembled in the drawing-room after their early dinner. "Wherever I go I am asked if I don't think her sweet, and whether I ever saw so pleasant a smile. And of course I say she is sweet, and I never have seen a smile worthy of the name before. But to tell the truth, I am getting rather tired of that perpetual smile; I wish I could get her to frown at something."

"She leaves the frowns to Godfrey," observed the Vicar, quietly, rather amused by his daughter's speech.

"Even Godfrey has been conquered by that irresistible smile, papa," resumed Matilda. "When they were here yesterday and she said she hoped it would not rain on Sunday, but that after all perhaps the country wanted rain, and so we must not complain if it came, I'm sure he sat gazing at her in speechless admiration."

Mrs. Thornhill laughed a little, but looked at her husband to reprove. He said nothing: and Matilda, thus encouraged, went on, until he interrupted her.

"With all due deference to your judgment, Matilda, I think Mrs. Mayne manages both father and son extremely well."

"Yes, papa, I don't deny that. I only complain that we are all expected to look upon her as a very remarkable woman, when she is really the ideal of the commonplace."

The Vicar began to stir his coffee very gravely, with his eyes down. His daughter waited, expecting a mild rebuke. At last he looked up and said, quietly:

"Upon what grounds do you call her commonplace?"

"Well, papa," answered Matilda, "first there is her appearance. I don't mean to say that she does not look like a lady, but she looks like so many other ladies! If you wanted someone to find her out in a crowd of others, you could not think of anyone distinguishing characteristic by which she might be known from the rest—until she talks, and then there is the smile."

"Now to me there is one very striking feature in her face," said the Vicar. "It attracted my attention much more than the smile which displeases you : it is the straight line of the mouth and the obstinate way in which it closes. I pity poor Mayne if his new wife should take a dislike to any of his whims or fancies. Perhaps, though, it does not become us to be too hard upon that quality."

The British virtue of pigheadedness distinguished every member of the Thornhill family, and shone very conspicuously in the Vicar himself ; who was perhaps not as much ashamed of it as he ought to have been.

"Well, at least, papa," persisted Matilda, "you will admit that she never says anything we have not heard many times before ; even about the interesting places she has been to. If you ask her a question about Nice, or Paris, or Italy, she never tells you anything worth hearing in her answer, and drifts back again as quickly as she can into small talk and smiles."

"Perhaps she does not want to talk about the places she has been to," suggested Elspeth. She was a pretty, silly little creature, much more accomplished than her sister, but much less intelligent. Her father smiled at her and replied to Matilda :

"Mrs. Mayne may be wise in keeping to what she can do best ; she smiles very prettily ; and you are the first person who has taken offence at her small talk. There is one thing that even you must give her credit for ; she is one of the kindest-hearted women I have ever met. The other day, on my way to Biddleforth, as I passed Gibson's cottage I saw him holding that young rascal, Tom Bennett, by the ear ; he had been caught robbing the hen-roost. Mrs. Mayne was passing in the pony-carriage ; she saw the boy caught, and she had got out to plead with old Gibson to let him go. He held out a long time, but she stuck to her point. So Gibson let the young thief off with a shaking, and then I felt bound to remonstrate against her interference with the course of justice. But she only said : 'Oh, Mr. Thornhill, I think the poor boy was sorry !' But I told her I knew him, and she need not think he was sorry for anything except that he had not got clear off with the eggs."

"But I don't think it is right of her to interfere like that," broke in Mrs. Thornhill, with some anxiety. "When people do wrong they must be punished for it. Dale told me that Mrs. Mayne came into the school on Friday, and begged off all the children who had punishment tasks to do. And it is the second time she has done so. Could you not speak to her, Robert, and explain to her that it is wrong, and unfair to the good ones ? They will think they can all be as naughty as they like if they get let off like that."

"I am not sure that the danger is not on the other side ; I think we have rather a tendency to over-punish children," said the Vicar, reflectively.

"Oh, then if Mrs. Mayne is to be allowed to beg them off when-

ever she visits the school, we may as well do without punishments at once : and then what will the children grow up like ? ” asked poor Mrs. Thornhill, aghast at the thought of the havoc such a revolution would work in the morals of Croxham.

“ I expect they would grow up, all the same, into much such men and women as their fathers and mothers,” murmured the Vicar in the particularly slow, soft tones he always fell into when discussion threatened to grow warm. “ It is nearly always the same children who have to be kept in over and over again, and the same who never have any fault found with them. I am inclined to think that many of the incorrigibly naughty ones would be good if they could. But I think we need not be afraid that Mrs. Mayne’s merciful spirit will do any great harm.”

Mrs. Thornhill listened to this discourse in dutiful silence, but with tightly-compressed lips and flushing cheeks. What strangely perverse spirit could induce him to unfold this subversive doctrine in the very presence of the children and their young governess ?

“ Dale said there were tears in her eyes when she asked him to forgive Mary Dodd for breaking that window,” said Matilda. “ She certainly is very tender-hearted, to be so anxious to shield these parish children whom she hasn’t known long enough to care for. Or else she must have an accountable sympathy for wrongdoers.”

“ Perhaps she has done something very wicked herself once, and that makes her sorry for other people,” suggested Elspeth.

Everybody laughed. It was just one of the silly speeches she was always making, drawing upon herself general derision. Even little Annette cried “ Oh, Elspeth ! ” The unfortunate girl grew crimson, and the tears came into her eyes.

“ Fancy sweet, placid Mrs. Mayne the author of a daring robbery, or committing a murder ! ” exclaimed Matilda. “ The goose that you are, Elspeth ! ”

“ Don’t tease her, Matilda,” pleaded Mrs. Thornhill.

“ I don’t see why you should think me so absurd,” said poor Elspeth.

“ Before Mrs. Mayne came, people thought she was going to be a dreadful woman, nothing too bad to be possible about her. Well, nobody knows any more about her past life now than they did before — ”

“ And you decline to be taken in, like the rest of us, by her simple face and her good-tempered smile. Is that it, Elspeth ? ” asked the Vicar, smiling.

“ No, papa, I like her very well ; but I don’t like everybody to laugh at me,” said she, timidly.

“ Well, well, child, all this is nonsense, of course,” said the Vicar.

“ Mrs. Mayne is very nice and I dare say we shall continue to like her. Dry your tears.”

There was really, on the whole, so little to discuss about Mr. Mayne’s second wife, and not any question as to the good taste he

had shown in making so thoroughly a suitable choice, that the flutter caused by the event was over very quickly, and she settled down to contented life at the Abbey, in the easiest way in the world. All that anybody cared to know about her previous life was known : that her first husband had been a doctor in Norfolk, that since his death, three years ago, she had lived abroad, that it was at Nice that Mr. Mayne had first met, and at Paris that he had married her. Even Mrs. Garner, the housekeeper, and Hawkins, the butler, who had had their prejudices against the new mistress of the Abbey, were won over by her sweet temper and gentle consideration of all about her. She inspired affection naturally ; so naturally and entirely that it was impossible for anyone in his senses not to like her ; and it was appropriately left to the imbecile Dick Wilding to prove the one exception to the rule.

Godfrey and his step-mother were walking round the garden together one evening about a fortnight after the coming home of the latter. They had just returned from a garden party, and were discussing the people they had met there.

"I hate garden parties," said Godfrey. "They are the slowest things I know."

"Well, they are not exciting, of course. But I like to see all the pretty young girls looking so fresh and bright in their light dresses ; and that is a thing that you ought not to be too blasé to admire."

"I don't think one requires to be very blasé to fail to admire the girls about here," returned Godfrey. "What has become of the famous and lovely Lancashire witches I don't know, but we do not see them now. There has not been a decent-looking girl in this part of the county within the memory of man."

"Godfrey !"

"Well, try to remember one among the girls you saw to-day who would be looked at twice, say, in Hyde Park in the season."

"I remember several. Miss Mansfield ; Charlotte Harley ; our neighbours the Thornhills. *They* looked charmingly simple and fresh in their white frocks. I know you admire them, Godfrey."

"Has my father been talking to you about the advisability of getting married, and telling you to sound me on the subject ?" interrupted Godfrey, turning to face his step-mother with a penetrating look.

She laughed, and a little guilty flush rose to her placid face. "You must not be angry with him or with me for discussing it. I took it rather as a compliment to myself that he should do so."

Godfrey felt intensely surprised. What on earth could have put such an idea into his father's head ? Did he want him gone, that the Abbey might be left free for himself and the new wife ?

"If I could meet a young woman just like you, I might think of it," he said, gallantly. "If you had a daughter, now —"

"I have a daughter," interrupted Mrs. Mayne, rather hesitatingly.

"Have you?" asked he, with sudden interest. "And you have never said a word about her! Where is she? Tell me, that I may go and fall in love and marry her at once."

"I cannot send you off on such a wildgoose chase as that."

"Seriously speaking, though," resumed Godfrey, "how is it that I never heard of her before?"

"I wonder you have not," said Mrs. Mayne. "Your father and I often talk about her. She was with me when I first met him. He is always asking me to have her here."

"Well, why don't you? Where is she now?"

"She is travelling in France with an old lady who has adopted her," replied Mrs. Mayne, rather nervously.

"That must be a dull life for a girl."

"Not for her. Mary has money of her own, so that she is independent, but she prefers that kind of life. She is very quiet, and I am afraid you would say very uninteresting. She never talks much, and she dislikes strangers."

"All that interests me. I want to see her. Couldn't the old lady spare her for a little while?"

"I am afraid not. And it would give Mary no pleasure to come."

"Not to see you!"

"Even that would scarcely compensate her for the misery of coming among strangers; she is so studious and shy."

"Studious!" said Godfrey, dubiously. Then after a minute's pause he continued persistently: "But you say she has seen my father, so he is not a stranger. Surely she would not be afraid of me!"

"I don't know, I am sure," said Mrs. Mayne. "All I know is that she cannot come."

"Then I shall live and die a bachelor. But—what makes you both so anxious that I should settle down into matrimony?" continued Godfrey. "Do you know, that puzzles me."

"It is not to settle you down, but to wake you up. And it is your father who is anxious, not I," she added, nervously. "I told him I saw no reason why you should be hurried into marriage before you felt inclined for it. He says you are listless and do not take much interest in anything."

"So I am to have a wife for an occupation? Very well; I dare say you are right: only please choose the lady for me and save me the trouble of doing anything more than go through the ceremony. I see you have an eye upon the Thornhill girls. Now, which is to be the happy instrument of my regeneration: pink-eyed Matilda with her sarcastic speeches, or pretty little bread-and-butter Elspeth?"

And Godfrey, who had been hovering between real anger and sham anger throughout this speech, waited for her answer with a somewhat disagreeable expression of face.

"Is it not rather unfair of you to be annoyed with me, Godfrey?" asked Mrs. Mayne in a gentle tone. "It can be nothing to me

whether you marry or remain single, except that I wish you to be as happy as possible in your future life."

"I see. Yes, I beg your pardon," said Godfrey, ashamed of his show of irritation. "The fact is, seriously, this: I have got over the age when a young man thinks 'every lass a queen;' and I have not yet got to that when a man wants someone young and fair and sweet about him, and feels that, so that she be but pleasant of face and pleasant of temper, one girl will do as well as another. I am just old enough and young enough to be critical—over-critical; to admire a woman with something more ideal about her than these very nice lady-like girls have; a woman who can excite my imagination, and make me think she has a thousand times more charms than—than she really has, perhaps. I dare say I am in the mood to fall in love with some clever, plainish woman who dresses perfectly; but with Matilda or Elspeth—no. Do not look troubled," he added, laughing. "My dangerous state of mind will pass away very quietly; and at thirty-five, or so, I shouldn't wonder if I were to lay my uninjured and carefully-preserved heart at the feet of one of the very women whom now, at twenty-five, I scorn. They will be 'getting on' and 'going off' by that time. And think what a prize I shall be then!"

Mrs. Mayne laughed also; and as he stopped to replace her shawl, which had slipped from her shoulders, she started with a low exclamation. They were standing a few yards from the wall which separated the Abbey garden from the Wildings' farmyard. The wall was almost hidden by the shrubs and trees on the garden side, but Godfrey's glance, following that of his step-mother, fell on the grinning face of Dick, who had mounted on an empty barrel in the yard and was able to rest his chin on the wall and peer at them between the branches.

"Who is that?" asked Mrs. Mayne. "I have seen him before, and once or twice met him in the lanes. He always looks at me so spitefully that I am half afraid of him."

"Get down. What are you doing up there?" called out Godfrey.

"Don't scold him; he is not doing anything wrong. Who is he?"

"It is only Wilding's son, an imbecile. You need not fear him. He never does any harm, but he takes the most absurd dislikes to people, and then delights in annoying them by his chatter and grimaces."

Dick had disappeared behind the wall.

"Poor fellow!" she said. "I am afraid he has taken a dislike to me. How can I let him know that I mean well to him?"

"You had better leave him alone," advised Godfrey. "If he has taken one of his mad prejudices against you, nothing will uproot it, and if you make overtures of peace to him, he will misunderstand you and perhaps frighten you. Nothing will alter his hatred of me;

and I expect if he has taken a dislike to you, it is because he has seen you with me."

"But I must let him know I don't wish to hurt him; I can't bear to be disliked, even by that poor lad," persisted Mrs. Mayne. "There must be some way to his affections. What does he care for most?"

"I don't think he cares much for anybody or anything save an old horse of his father's, which he rides up and down the lane at the back fifty times a day; and then leads by a bit of rope when the animal is too tired to carry him longer."

"Then he is cruel?"

"No, he does not mean to be. You may hear him expostulating with the horse, and putting it to him as a friend that he ought not to give in like that. I think he is happy in his way; but I would not interfere with him if I were you."

Mrs. Mayne said no more upon the subject; but there was a set expression about her mouth which her step-son had not yet learned to read.

Two days after this, as he was crossing the garden, he heard cries from the lane at the back. Thinking he recognised the voice he hurried through the plantation and met his step-mother just as she was running to the gate. A small stone whizzed past his head at the same moment, and he was in time to see that it was thrown by Dick Wilding. He stood with one arm over the neck of his old horse, and was uttering angry, excited cries.

With one short word, Godfrey made for him, seized him by the collar, and began to administer with his cane a sharp stroke or two. Dick took the correction in cowering silence, uttering no word, no cry. Mrs. Mayne came running up, and seized the punishing arm.

"Godfrey, Godfrey, how can you be so cruel, so wicked!" she cried, in a passion of pity and indignation.

"Cruel! wicked!—do you know that he was throwing stones at you?" cried Godfrey, staying the thrashing but not releasing his hold of the culprit.

"But he did not mean anything. He thought I was about to hurt his horse. It was all a mistake—he did not understand. Do let him go! You must let him go." Then turning to Dick, who glowered at her angrily but seemed too much confused to speak, she said: "I was not going to hurt your horse, only to pat his neck. Indeed I would not hurt you or your horse for the world. I only wanted to show you that I am not an enemy, but a friend; and now I have brought this upon you. I am so very sorry."

She gently took his thin rough hand in hers; her soft voice was shaking with distress. Dick sullenly allowed her to shake his hand; but there was no softening, no gleam of intelligence in his vacant, shifting glance, until she attempted to stroke his horse's neck in token of good faith and reconciliation. Then he woke up into fiery excitement.

"Don't touch Smiler," he shouted. "I won't have you touch him. Leave him alone, I tell you!"

Godfrey's hand was again laid upon his collar; but the agony in his step-mother's face as she looked up at him, with a little cry, made him release the lad once more.

"Now, will you be kind enough to go indoors?" said he to her, rather impatiently. "You look very white; this has shaken you. I have something to say to Dick; I will not be harsh, I promise you."

"Let me hear what you have to say to him, Godfrey. You have scolded him enough. It was all my fault: he mistook me. You must let him go; and you must come indoors with me."

She spoke pleadingly, but with a dogged pertinacity in voice and manner which showed a determination to carry her point. Godfrey yielded; dismissing Dick and his poor old favourite with a glance that intimated their settlement was only deferred. But he and his step-mother had scarcely reached the gate before she spoke.

"Godfrey, I want you to give me your word that you will let this unfortunate incident rest here, and that you will never refer to it again in any way, either to your father, or Mr. Wilding, or Dick, or anyone; and that you will not seek to punish him further."

"I cannot promise that," said Godfrey, promptly.

She turned from him, saying no more, and went on to the house. Godfrey felt that she was intensely angry.

When they met at dinner her eyes were red, her face was pale, and she looked really ill. Mr. Mayne seemed to detect that something was amiss, and was inquisitive and anxious, but she said not a word; neither, of course, did Godfrey. After dinner, he followed her at once to the drawing-room.

"Of course I will not say anything more to that fellow, or punish him further for his amusing games, if you insist," he said. "But I think it is a pity you should make yourself ill about such a trifle."

"Oh, Godfrey, it is not a trifle! And I am so glad! Thank you very, very much," she added, holding out her plump hand to him in great relief. "He is not much better than an idiot."

"Very little; he is called the Idiot Dick all over Croxham. What makes you so singularly tender-hearted?" added Godfrey, curiously. "You seem to feel a strange sort of sympathy for the undeserving. I think"—laughing—"you must have a perverted moral sense. Otherwise you would not always want to shelter those who have done wrong."

She did not answer at once: and when he looked at her he saw that her smooth, placid face looked troubled, and that on her cheeks there was a bright red flush.

"I think those are the people who want it most," she said in a very low voice.

And Godfrey was considering her face and her answer with a vague feeling of wonder and interest, when his father came in.

CHAPTER III.

STARTLED.

GODFREY MAYNE'S surprise and admiration at his step-mother's tenderness of heart had not at all subsided, when they were aroused afresh some few days later by her reception of the news of a tragedy, which had occurred in an outlying district of Croxham parish. The wife of a labourer had, in a fit of drunken anger, struck one of her step-children with an iron saucepan, inflicting a blow, the effects of which killed the lad. It was Mr. Mayne who brought home the tidings.

"Poor woman! how I pity her!" exclaimed Mrs. Mayne.

Her husband stared. "Pity! My dear Laura, that is not the common view taken of the affair."

"But she did not know what she was doing. You say she was not sober."

"That makes two offences instead of one. She got tipsy, which was wrong, and she caused the death of her step-son, which was worse. I hope you do not defend such an action as that."

"I begin to feel uncomfortable," said Godfrey, with mock solemnity.

But the utter seriousness of Mrs. Mayne was not to be shaken. Godfrey began to look at her with an intent curiosity, as she continued to plead the cause of the guilty woman; suddenly noticing this in the middle of her speech, she blushed, faltered, and dropped into silence.

Later in the evening, however, as Godfrey, strolling in the garden for the enjoyment of a quiet cigar, was passing the drawing-room window, he heard her imploring her husband to use all the influence he possessed to have the charge of murder against the woman commuted to that of manslaughter, at the coroner's inquest. Godfrey strolled on, in reflection.

"Nothing ever disturbs her placid contentment save the thought of people getting punished," commented he. "There must be some reason for it in so tranquil a nature as hers is. Someone she was interested in must have done something wrong at some time or other: she is not the sort of woman to have done anything out of the beaten track herself. Perhaps old Dixon was a bad lot? Very likely. That would explain her devotion to my father. I must find out all about him some day, if I can do it without hurting her feelings. I wonder what her daughter is like? And why we have heard so little about her?"

Mr. Mayne evidently wished the young lady to come to Croxham. Mrs. Mayne as evidently appeared to wish to keep her away.

While matters were in this state, the following advertisement appeared in the second column of the *Times*.

"To M—D—. If you have broken off all communication with the unprincipled persons who enslaved you in R—two years and

a half ago, and are willing to re-open correspondence with your mother she may ultimately receive you back on certain conditions."

Mrs. Mayne and Godfrey had driven to Cheston that morning, and had got the *Times* at the station. Godfrey had been glancing over it in the brougham, when Mrs. Mayne suddenly tore off the upper part of the first page and wrapped it round one of the little parcels she was carrying.

"But—do you see what you are doing?" cried Godfrey.

"It doesn't matter, it is only the advertisement sheet: all my needles were dropping out," said she, tranquilly. "Where are we going now?"

"To the photographer's. Aunt Madge—Mrs. Penteith, you know—insists on having my portrait for her birthday. I always 'come out' looking more like a guy than before, but she does not mind that. You won't wait, will you?"

"Yes, I will, if you are not long. Your father wants me to be 'taken,' so I'll see how they do them."

So they both got out at the photographer's, and Mrs. Mayne looked through the cases while Godfrey went into the studio.

"Are these all people who—" she began, carelessly, to the girl in attendance; when suddenly she broke off in her speech, and remained staring fixedly at the case in front of her.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," said the girl, watching her curiously.

Mrs. Mayne recovered her self-command with a start; and then, noticing the attendant's eyes fixed inquiringly upon her, she pointed to the portrait of a young girl.

"What is the name of that lady?"

"The *lady*, ma'am?"—for the attendant had thought she was looking at the picture next it.

"Yes, the lady."

"That is one of Mr. Greville Masterton's daughters. He is the Rector of Cheston."

"She is singularly like a young girl I used to know. Were all these portraits taken here—and lately?"

"They were all taken here, ma'am, but some of them a long while back—before I came. I have been here twelve months."

"This is Mrs. Underwood, of Croxham Grange, is it not?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"And who is this? A son of Mrs. Underwood's?"—It was the portrait of a very young man with a weak, handsome face.

"No, ma'am, I don't think so," hesitated the girl. "Oh, no, I remember: it is the portrait of a poor young gentleman who was murdered abroad in a very mysterious manner. I do not know the story, but I heard two gentlemen talking of it here the other day: the one was telling the other."

"Dear me, how sad!" said Mrs. Mayne, after a moment's pause.

"What was—his name?"

"I don't remember, madam ; but I can ask ——"

"Oh, no, don't trouble to do that. Did he live near here?"

"I don't think so, ma'am. I am but a stranger here. It was a dreadful murder, I believe, and the people have not been discovered yet."

"What a sad story!" murmured Mrs. Mayne again ; and she passed on to the next case.

Godfrey came in. He stopped short in his first words to look down at his step-mother. "Why, what is the matter? What has happened?"

"Nothing has happened. Why?" added she, as she hurried him out of the shop.

"You look so ill; so—different; just as if you had had some terrible fright."

"I was standing in a draught and I got chilled," she replied.

But a draught that takes the colour from your very lips on a hot day in July is not easy to find, and Godfrey wondered. He said no more, for he began to understand that it was of no use to try to find out by questioning more than his step-mother chose to tell.

If any doubt had existed in his mind on that point, an event which happened a few days later would have dissipated it. They were all at breakfast ; and Godfrey, having by some strange chance come down in time, was there when the letters were opened. Mrs. Mayne had begun to read one, the envelope of which bore a French postmark, when she uttered an involuntary cry of surprise and annoyance.

"What is it?" asked her husband.

"Oh, nothing ; only a letter from Mary."

"What about? What does she say?"

"I don't know yet," she answered, and put the letter into her pocket, unfinished.

Mr. Mayne was rather inquisitive ; he had, moreover, a suspicion that something was being kept back from him. "May I see the letter, Laura?"

She hesitated. "It is full of nonsensical chit-chat, I don't want you to laugh at my daughter. Won't you trust to my description of its contents?"

"Of course if you decline to let me see it, I must," answered he, coldly.

She looked crestfallen and disturbed, and the plump white hands trembled as she poured out the coffee, as Godfrey saw ; the tears were gathering in her soft blue eyes. Breakfast went on in silence. But when they rose from table, Mrs. Mayne, who may have gathered wisdom in her former married state, stopped her husband on his way to the door, held out her daughter's letter, and spoke meekly :

"Will you give it back to me when you have read it, Henry? I have not finished it myself, yet."

"No, no, my dear," said he, conquered at once and refusing to take it. "I don't want to read your letter ; at least until you have

done so. I always like to hear news of little pale Mary, who so much interested me."

Godfrey wondered whether she had calculated upon this effect of her offer, for she slipped the letter back into her pocket immediately. But Mr. Mayne's awakened curiosity had yet to be satisfied.

"You can let me see it by-and-by, you know, Laura."

He was obstinate too; so the truth came out, when she found there could be no escape.

"I was only afraid of disturbing you," she said. "Madame de Bréteuil is dead."

"Dead! Dear me! Then where is the poor child going? She must come here at once, Laura. You know I always wanted her to come."

"You see! I knew it would disturb you and make you anxious; you are so kindhearted. Mary is quite safe; she is staying in the house of an English clergyman, who is doing temporary duty at Dinan."

"That's all very well for the moment. But she must come here."

"She talks of—of entering a sisterhood. You ——"

"A *what*?" interrupted Mr. Mayne.

Mrs. Mayne her bit lips. "A sisterhood," she repeated. "Quite a superior one; where only gentlewomen are received," she concluded, nervously, perceiving the astounded look of her hearers. "You know how shy and reserved Mary is. She likes nursing, and district-visiting ——"

"She can have as much district visiting as she likes here; they will be only too glad to get her. Surely you will not allow your own daughter to go drifting about the world without any protection, when there is a home ready and open for her. She is a dear, lady-like little girl," added Mr. Mayne, "and I shall be as proud of her as if she were a daughter of my own. Give me the clergyman's name and address? I will write to him and to Mary also, and ask him to see her off to England without delay. We will try to bring the roses into her pale cheeks—and find her a husband, perhaps. She would make an excellent wife for a parson. Come, Laura—the address."

Very reluctantly, Mrs. Mayne took out her letter and read the address; and he went off to the library. Godfrey, who had been a silent spectator and listener, strolled into the garden. He wondered a little—and he was beginning not to like Miss Dixon; she was the type of young lady he did not care for. Small, pale, shy, demure, good, devoted to district visiting, to nursing, and a capital wife for a parson!

But Godfrey had noticed about his step-mother's mouth, as she took out the letter and read the clergyman's address, the very same look of dogged determination that he had seen there before. For some reason or other it was evident that she did not wish her daughter to come to the Abbey; and, remembering how resolutely she had stuck to her point on other occasions, he was interested to see how the struggle

between the two wills, hers and his father's, would end. As he went back indoors, his father beckoned him into the library: an oak wainscoted room, lined with dull-looking volumes, which nobody had the bad taste to disturb.

"Sit down, Godfrey. I have been writing to this Mr. Clarke, the clergyman, to ask him to see Mary Dixon off."

"You are determined that she shall come, then?" said Godfrey.

"Yes. Have you any objection? This is what I wanted to ask you. I don't wish to take a new inmate into the house against your wish. I consider it right to consult you in the matter."

"You didn't think so a little while ago, sir," said Godfrey, rather grimly, "when you made up your mind to marry again."

"Ah, that was a different thing. A man's marriage is his own affair," returned his father, hastily. "But if you have any objection to her coming, we can let her understand it is but for a short visit."

"Oh, I have no objection," said Godfrey. "I thought your wife had; that's all."

"What objection can she have?"

"I don't know, I'm sure."

"Now it seems to me that a little more youth about the place will do us all good. We old people want a little lively society ——"

"I am not very old."

"Neither are you very lively. Why are you answering me in this short, dry manner, Godfrey?"

"I beg your pardon, father; I did not know that I was short and dry. I was only thinking that if Miss Dixon is shy, silent and studious, as you have described her to be, her coming will not enliven any of us: but it does not concern me in any way."

Mr. Mayne, a tall, sparely built man, to whom a mass of dark hair which had turned grey early gave an appearance of dignity that his kind, rather handsome face and fussy manners would not otherwise have possessed, drew himself up to his full height and looked annoyed.

"Yes, it does concern you, Godfrey—it may concern you more than anybody. She is an uncommonly nice girl, and if you should chance to take a fancy to her, or she to you, why ——"

"I see," said Godfrey, hardly knowing whether to feel annoyed, or to laugh.

"Her mother is sufficient recommendation for her: but Mary herself is all that you could wish. And then ——"

"And then we should have both of them in the family," put in Godfrey. "But what would be gained by that, father, when one of them can rule us both?"

"I don't understand you, Godfrey," said Mr. Mayne. "What do you mean?"

"I mean," said his son, waking to the fact that he was going a little too far, "that your wife does what you wish, and makes me do the same."

This rather free translation appeased Mr. Mayne; and his son continued:

"As for marrying Miss Dixon, I don't think a lady who would make a capital wife for a parson would suit me. A man's marriage, as you said yourself, sir, is his own affair, and I think a wife whose chief pleasure lay in district-visiting would go rather over my head."

"Well, well, I have nothing to say about it," said his father, rising, and beginning to fear that he had not conducted the interview with all the delicate diplomacy he had intended to use.

"You have said a great deal too much, you well-meaning, dear old bungler," thought Godfrey, dutifully. "Why are you anxious that I should marry, father? It is quite a new idea."

"Well, you see you are leading so useless a life, as if you had no interest in it; that's what your mother thinks. And, as she says, if you took a nice wife, it would be—be—the making of you."

"To be sure," assented Godfrey. "I will think of it."

He went up to the deserted school-room of the old days, that he now used as his smoking-room, and sat down in the worn American rocking-chair, that Mademoiselle Perrin, their French governess, used to put herself into after she had set them some particularly hard task. Godfrey lit a cigar and fell into reflection.

"So! Mrs. Mayne says it is my father that wishes me to take a wife; *he* says it is my step-mother. He is no diplomatist and he is fussy and fidgety, but he is the soul of truth, and guileless as a child. She *means* me to do so, and I wonder why. If she decides to marry me to her daughter, I suppose she will accomplish it, even against my own will. I am beginning to be rather afraid of that *main de fer*, and I think I would not choose my step-mother's exact counterpart to love and to cherish. If Miss Dixon should really turn out to be like her mamma in disposition and in appearance, and if she should then take it into her head to bless me with her hand, there would be nothing for it but flight. Let us hope she will not come, and that my bachelor-ease be not already doomed."

Godfrey rose, and went to the window. The school-room was at that end of the house which joined the Wildings' premises. With his elbows on the window-sill, he leaned out and looked down into the farmyard. Nancy Wilding, the farmer's active daughter, was busy there amid some milk-pails.

"They are in a great hurry to marry me off. By Jove! suppose I took them at their word and made an offer to Nancy!—Nancy!" he called out, laughing.

She was a year or two older than himself, well-grown, well-looking, buxom, with shrewd, twinkling black eyes, and a good-natured face. "Well, Master Godfrey?" she answered, shading her eyes from the sun as she looked up at him.

"I've got orders to take a wife. Will you have me, Nancy?"

"Yes, like a bird, Master Godfrey—when we get a month of Sundays."

"But that is a rude way of answering, Nancy. That is as much as to say, 'never.'"

"And 'never' is just what I mean, Master Godfrey. And it is no ruder than to ask a young woman to have you when you don't want her."

"Why wouldn't you have me, Nancy?"

"Because you are a gentleman, Master Godfrey; and an idle one sides."

"But I am only idle while I've nothing to do. I could work if I pleased—drive the pigs to market."

"Bless you! The pigs would drive themselves better than you'd drive them."

Godfrey acquiesced in this. "How is Jane?" he asked.

"Oh, she's better to-day, sir. She has gone out to walk in the sunshine. Father will take her for a bit of a drive by-and-by."

"It is a pity she should have been laid up just these few days that she is at home, Nancy."

"So it is, Master Godfrey; mother was saying so. Jane has been always subject to these sore throats. She is going to-morrow to stay a day or two with Mrs. Caird at Cheston, and then she goes back to her place."

"Caird, the florist's wife?"

"Yes, sir."

At that moment, Godfrey heard his father's voice calling to him. He opened the door and went along the corridor to the head of the stairs, from whence he could see Mr. Mayne in the hall below, opening the post-bag.

"Where did you get that watch mended, Godfrey?"

"At Goode's, in Rodney Street."

"All right; I'll call there, then. I'm going into Cheston, and I'll just post these two letters for France there; perhaps they'll catch an earlier post than if I left them to go by William to-night."

He took out of the bag his letters to Dinan, and left the house; while Godfrey remained for a few minutes on the landing above with his cigar in his mouth and his back against the wall, debating what he should do with himself till luncheon. He had not yet decided, when he heard a distant door close on the floor below him, and soon after a soft footstep in the hall. Looking down, he saw his step-mother, with a glance round her which did not take in his own figure in the shadow of the corridor above, go up to the hall-table, open the bag, and quickly turn out and examine the letters put in it to be posted. By the eagerness with which she glanced about the table, and once more turned over the letters before putting them with evident disappointment back again, it was clear that she was searching for something she could not find. Then she put the bag exactly as it had been before, and went softly back in the direction of the drawing-room.

Her step-son had watched her proceedings with much interest. When she had disappeared from his sight, he took a few steps forward, and looked down at the post-bag long and reflectively.

"Mrs. Mayne, Mrs. Mayne," thought he to himself, "these are strong measures to take for a very little matter. I admire your pertinacity; I really do; but I don't think it ought to carry you to so questionable a proceeding as interfering with post-bags and tampering with your husband's correspondence."

For he had no doubt that her search had been for the two letters for France; and from the feverish eagerness her usually calm face had shown, and the trembling of her plump white hands, he felt the very strongest suspicions that if she had found those she sought, she would not have contented herself with looking at the outside.

Feeling inwardly perturbed, Mrs. Mayne had stepped out of the drawing-room window to the open air, perhaps that it might cool her, perhaps to see if she could find her husband. Strolling down to the gate, she stood there, looking up and down the road. A comely young woman, neatly dressed in black, who was passing turned her glance on Mrs. Mayne. She was turning it away again, when, with an expression of great surprise, she continued to gaze at the lady's face. Only for a half moment; then she quietly pursued her way.

Mrs. Mayne hurried back to the house, her gait unsteady, her lips white, evidently startled.

"Who was that?" she gasped. "I have seen the face somewhere. She seemed to—to recognise me!"

She and Godfrey had begun luncheon when Mr. Mayne came in. He said he had been to Cheston; and stated, amid other items of news, that he had there posted his two letters for Dinan. Godfrey saw a faint flush rise to his step-mother's cheek. Presently she remarked that she had changed her mind about going out, and that if neither of them wanted the brougham she would order it to be made ready.

"I want to match some wools at Cheston," she explained to her husband, who looked rather surprised at her change of plans.

"Will you allow me to accompany you," said Godfrey, as they rose from table, and the brougham was heard coming round. "I have to get some fresh books."

He began to understand the significant trembling of the white hands: the only sign she gave at the moment that his request was unwelcome. But she could not refuse it. She replied that she should be glad of his society.

"No you won't, madam," thought Godfrey, as he went upstairs to change his coat. "I think I know what you have to do at Cheston, and I must see whether I am right. You have aroused my curiosity as to why you are so extremely anxious to prevent your daughter's coming to the Abbey."

(To be continued.)

ROGER BEVERE.

MR. BRANDON'S SKELETON.

"THERE'S trouble everywhere. It attaches itself more or less to all people as they journey through life. Yes, I quite agree with what you say, Squire: that I, a man at my ease in the world and possessing no close ties of my own, ought to be tolerably exempt from care. But I am not. You have heard of the skeleton in the closet, Johnny Ludlow. Few families are without one. I have mine."

Mr. Brandon nodded to me, as he spoke, over the silver coffee-pot. I had gone to the Tavistock Hotel from Miss Deveen's to breakfast with him and the Squire—who had come up for a week. You have heard of this visit of ours to London before, and there's no need to say more about it here.

The present skeleton in Mr. Brandon's family closet was his nephew, Roger Bevere. The young fellow, now aged twenty-three, had been for some years in London pursuing his medical studies, and giving perpetual trouble to his people in the country. During this present visit Mr. Brandon had been unable to hear of him. Searching here, enquiring there, nothing came of it: Roger seemed to have vanished into air. This morning the post had brought Mr. Brandon a brief note:

"Sir,—Roger Bevery is lying at No. 60, Gibraltar Terrace (Islington District), with a broken arm. Faithfully yours, T. Pitt."

The name was spelt Bevery in the note, you observe. Strangers, deceived by the pronunciation, Bev-e-re, were apt to write it so.

"Well, this is nice news!" had been Mr. Brandon's comment upon the short note.

"Anyway, you will be more at your ease now you have found him," remarked the Squire.

"I don't know that, Todhetley. I have found, it seems, the address of the place where he is lying, but I have not found *him*. Roger has been going to the bad this many a day; I expect by this time he must be nearing the journey's end."

"It is only a broken arm that he has, sir," I put in, thinking what a gloomy view he was taking of it all. "That is soon cured."

"Don't you speak so confidently, Johnny Ludlow," reproved Mr. Brandon. "We shall find more the matter with Roger than a broken arm; take my word for that. He has been on the wrong tack this long while. A broken arm would not cause him to hide himself—and that's what he must have been doing."

"Some of those hospital students are a wild lot—as I have heard," said the Squire.

Mr. Brandon nodded in answer. "When Roger came from Hampshire to enter on his studies at St. Bartholomew's, he was as pure-hearted, well-intentioned a young fellow as had ever been trained by an anxious mother"—and Mr. Brandon poured a drop more weak tea out of his own tea-pot to cover his emotion. "Fit for Heaven, one might have thought: anyway, had been put in the road that leads to it. Loose, reckless companions got hold of him, and dragged him down to their evil ways."

Breakfast over, little time was lost in starting to find out Gibraltar Terrace. The cab soon took us to it. Roger had been lying there more than a week. Hastening up that way one evening, on leaving the hospital, to call upon a fellow-student, he was knocked down by a fleet hansom rounding the corner of Gibraltar Terrace. Pitt the doctor happened to be passing at the time, and had him carried into the nearest house: one he had attended patients in before. The landlady, Mrs. Mapping, showed us up stairs.

(And she, poor faded woman, turned out to have been known to the Squire in the days long gone-by, when she was pretty little Dorothy Grape. But I have told her story already, and there's no need to allude to it again.)

Roger lay in bed, in a small back room on the first floor; a mild, fair, pleasant-looking young man with a white bandage round his head. Mr. Pitt explained that the arm was not absolutely broken, but so much contused and inflamed as to be a worse hurt. This would not have kept him in bed, however, but the head had also been damaged, and fever set in.

"So this is where he has lain, hiding, while I have been ransacking London for him!" remarked Mr. Brandon, who was greatly put-out by the whole affair; and perhaps the word "hiding" might have more truth in it than even he suspected.

"When young Scott called last night—a fellow student of your nephew's who comes to see him and bring him changes of clothes from his lodgings—he said you were making enquiries at the hospital and had left your address," explained Pitt. "So I thought I ought to write to you, sir."

"And I am much obliged to you for doing it, and for your care of him also," said Mr. Brandon.

And presently, when Pitt was leaving, he followed him down stairs to Mrs. Mapping's parlour, to ask whether Roger was in danger.

"I do not apprehend any, now that the fever is subsiding," answered Pitt. "I can say almost surely that none will arise if we can only keep him quiet. That has been the difficulty throughout—his restlessness. It is just as though he had something on his mind."

"What should he have on his mind?" retorted Mr. Brandon, in contention. "Except his sins. And I expect *they* don't trouble him much."

Pitt laughed a little. "Well, sir, he is not in any danger at present. But if the fever were to come back again—and increase—why, I can't foresee what the result might be."

"Then I shall send for Lady Bevere."

Pitt opened his eyes. "Lady Bevere!" he repeated. "Who is she?"

"Lady Bevere, sir, is Roger's mother and my sister. I shall write to-day."

Mr. Brandon had an appointment with his lawyers that morning and went out with the Squire to keep it, leaving me with the patient. "And take care you don't let him talk, Johnny," was his parting injunction to me. "Keep him perfectly quiet."

That was all very well, and I did my best to obey orders; but Roger would not be kept quiet. He was for ever sighing and starting; now turning to this side, now to that, and throwing his undamaged arm up like a ball at play.

"Is it pain that makes you so restless?" I asked.

"Pain, no," he groaned. "It's the bother. The pain is nothing now to what it was."

"Bother of what?"

"Oh—altogether. I say, what on earth brought Uncle John to London just now?"

"A matter connected with my property. He is my guardian and trustee, you know." To which answer Bevere only groaned again.

After taking a great jorum of beef-tea, which Mrs. Mapping brought up at midday, he was lying still and tranquil, when there came a loud knock at the street door. Steps clattered up the stairs, and a tall, dark-haired young man put his head into the room.

"Bever, old fellow, how are you? We've been so sorry to hear of your mishap!"

There was nothing alarming in the words and they were spoken gently; or in the visitor either, for he was good looking; but in a moment Bevere was sitting bolt-upright in bed, gazing out in a fright as though he saw an apparition.

"What the deuce has brought you here, Lightfoot?" he cried, angrily.

"Came to see how you were getting on, friend," was the light and soothing answer, as the stranger drew near the bed. "Head and arm damaged, I hear."

"Who told you where to find me?"

"Scott. At least, he ——"

"Scott's a false knave then! He promised me faithfully not to tell a soul."—And Bevere's inflamed face and passionate voice presented a contrast to his usual mild countenance and gentle tones.

"There's no need to excite yourself," said the tall young man, sitting down on the edge of the bed and taking the patient's hand. "Dick Scott let fall a word unawares—that Pitt was attending you. So I came up to Pitt's just now and got the address out of his surgery-boy."

"Who else heard the chance word?"

"Nobody else. And I'm sure you know that you may trust me. I wanted to ask if I could do anything for you. How frightened you look, old fellow!"

Bevere lay down again, painfully uneasy yet, as was plain to be seen.

"I didn't want anybody to find me out here," he said. "If some—some people came, there might be the dickens to pay. And Uncle John is up now, worse luck! He does not understand London ways, and he is the strictest old guy that ever wore silver shoe-buckles—you should see him on state occasions. Ask Johnny Ludlow there whether he is strait-laced or not; he knows. Johnny, this is Charley Lightfoot: one of us at Bart's."

Charley turned to shake hands, saying he had heard of me. He then set himself to soothe Bevere, assuring him he would not tell anybody where he was lying, or that he had been to see him.

"Don't mind my temper, old friend," whispered Bevere, repentantly, his blue eyes going out to the other's in sad yearning. "I am a bit tried—as you'd admit, if all were known."

Lightfoot departed. By-and-by the Squire and Mr. Brandon returned, and Mrs. Mapping gave us some lunch in her parlour. When the Squire was ready to leave, I ran up to say good-bye to Roger. He gazed at me questioningly, eyes and cheeks glistening with fever. "Is it true?" he whispered.

"Is what true?"

"That Uncle John has written for my mother?"

"Oh yes, that's true."

"Good Heavens!" murmured Bevere.

"Would you not like to see her?"

"It's not that. She's the best mother living. It is—for fear—I didn't *want* to be found out lying here," he broke off, "and it seems that all the world is coming. If it gets to certain ears, I'm done for."

Scarlet and more scarlet grew his cheeks. His pulse must have been running up to about a hundred-and-fifty.

"As sure as you are alive, Roger, you'll bring the fever on again!"

"So much the better! I do—save for what I might say in my ravings," he retorted. "So much the better if it carries me off! There'd be an end to it all, then."

"One might think you had a desperate secret on your conscience," I said to him in my surprise. "Had set a house on fire, or something as good."

"And I have a secret; and it's something far more dreadful than setting a house on fire," he avowed, recklessly, in his distress. "And if it should get to the knowledge of Uncle John and the mother—well, I tell you, Johnny Ludlow, I'd rather die than face the shame."

Was he raving now?—as he had been on the verge of, in the fever,

a day or two ago. No, not by the wildest stretch of the fancy could I think so. That he had fallen into some desperate trouble which must be kept secret, if it could be, was all too evident. I thought of fifty things as I went home and could not fix on one of them as likely. Had he robbed the hospital till?—or forged a cheque upon its house surgeon? The Squire wanted to know why I was so silent.

When I next went to Gibraltar Terrace Lady Bevere was there. Such a nice little woman! Her face was mild, like Roger's, her eyes were blue and kind as his, her tones as genial. As Mary Brandon she had been very pretty, and she was pleasing still.

She had married a lieutenant in the navy, Edmund Bevere. Her people did not like it: navy lieutenants were so poor, they said. He got on better, however, than the Brandons had thought for; got up to be rear-admiral and to be knighted. Then he died; and Lady Bevere was left with a lot of children and not much to bring them up on. I expect it was her brother, Mr. Brandon, who helped to start them all in life. She lived in Hampshire, somewhere near Southsea.

In a day or two, when Roger was better and sat up in blankets in an easy chair, Mr. Brandon and the Squire began about his shortcomings—deeming him well enough now to be tackled. Mr. Brandon demanded where his lodgings were, for their locality seemed to be a mystery; evidently with a view of calling and putting a few personal questions to the landlady; and Roger had to confess that he had had no particular lodgings lately; he had shared Dick Scott's. This took Mr. Brandon aback. No lodgings of his own!—sharing young Scott's! What was the meaning of it? What did he do with all the money allowed him, if he could not pay for rooms of his own? And to the stern questioning Roger only answered that he and Scott liked to be together. Pitt laughed a little to me when he heard of this, saying Bevere was too clever for the old mentors.

"Why! don't you believe he does live with Scott?" I asked.

"Oh, he may do that; it's likely enough," said Pitt. "But medical students, running their fast career in London, are queer subjects, let me tell you, Johnny Ludlow; they don't care to have their private affairs supervised."

"All of them are not queer—as you call it, Pitt."

"No, indeed," he answered, warmly: "or I don't know what would become of the profession. Many of them are worthy, earnest fellows always, steady as old time. Others pull up when they have had their fling, and make good men; and a few go to the bad altogether."

"In which class do you put Roger Bevere?"

Pitt took a minute to answer. "In the second, I hope," he said. "To speak the truth, Bevere somewhat puzzles me. He seems well-intentioned, anxious, and can't have gone so far but he might pull-up if he could. But——"

"If he could! How do you mean?"

"He has got, I take it, into the toils of a fast, bad set; and he finds

their habits too strong to break through. Anyway without great difficulty."

"Do you think he—drinks?" I questioned, reluctantly.

"No mistake about that," said Pitt. "Not so sharply as some of them do, but more than is good for him."

I'm sure if Roger's pulling-up depended upon his mother, it would have been done. She was so gentle and loving with him; never finding fault, or speaking a harsh word. Night and morning she sat by the bed, holding his hand in hers, and reading the Psalms to him—or a prayer—or a chapter in the Bible. I can see her now, in her soft black gown and simple little white lace cap, under which her hair was smoothly braided.

Whatever doubts some of us might be entertaining of Roger, nothing unpleasant in regard to him transpired. Dreaded enemies did not find him out, or come to besiege the house; though he never quite lost his under-current of uneasiness. He soon began to mend rapidly. Scott visited him every second or third day; he seemed to be fully in his confidence, and they had whisperings together. He was a good-natured, off-hand kind of young man, short and thick-set. I can't say I much cared for him.

The Squire had left London. I remained on with Miss Deveen, and went down to Gibraltar Terrace most days. Lady Bevere was now going home and Mr. Brandon with her. Some trouble had arisen about the lease of her house in Hampshire, which threatened to end in a lawsuit, and she wanted him to see into it. They fixed upon some eligible lodgings for Roger near Russell Square, into which he would move when they left. He was sufficiently well now to go about; and would keep well, Pitt said, if he took care of himself. Lady Bevere held a confidential interview with the landlady, about taking care of her son Roger.

And she gave a last charge to Bevere himself, when taking leave of him the morning of her departure. The cab was at the door to convey her and Mr. Brandon to Waterloo station, and I was there also, having gone betimes to Gibraltar Terrace to see the last of them.

"For my sake, my dear," pleaded Lady Bevere, holding Roger to her, as the tears ran down her cheeks: "you will do your best to keep straight for my sake!"

"I will, I will, mother," he whispered back in agitation, his own eyes wet; "I will keep as straight as I can." But in his voice there lay, to my ear, a ring of hopeless despair. I don't know whether she detected it.

She turned and took my hands. She and Mr. Brandon had already exacted a promise from me that once a week at least, so long as I remained in London, I would write to each of them to give news of Roger's welfare.

"You will be sure not to forget it, Johnny? I am very anxious

about him—his health—and—and all,” she added in a lowered voice. “I am always fearing lest I did not do my duty by my boys. Not but that I ever tried to do it; but somehow I feel that perhaps I might have done it better. Altogether I am full of anxiety for Roger.”

“I will be sure to write to you regularly as long as I am near him, dear Lady Bevere.”

II.

It was on a Tuesday morning that Lady Bevere and Mr. Brandon left London. In the afternoon Roger was installed in his new lodgings by Mr. Pitt, who had undertaken to see him into them. He had the parlour and the bed-chamber behind it. Very nice rooms they were, the locality and street open and airy; and the landlady, Mrs. Long, was a comfortable, motherly woman. Where his old lodgings had been situated, he had never said, even to me: the Squire's opinion was (communicated in confidence to Mr. Brandon), that he had played up “Old Gooseberry” in them, and was afraid to say.

I had meant to go to him on the Wednesday, to see that the bustle of removal had done him no harm; but Miss Deveen wanted me, so I could not. On the Thursday I got a letter from the Squire, telling me to do some business for him at Westminster. It took me the whole of the day: that is, the actual business took about a quarter of an hour, and waiting to see the people (lawyers) took the rest. This brought it, you perceive, to Friday.

On that morning I mounted to the roof of a city omnibus, which set me down not far off the house. Passing the parlour windows to knock at the door, I saw in one of them a card: “Apartments to let.” It was odd, I thought, they should put it in a room that was occupied.

“Can I see Mr. Bevere?” I asked of the servant.

“Mr. Bevere's gone, sir.”

“Gone where? Not to the hospital?”—For he was not to attempt to go there until the following week.

“He is gone for good, sir,” she answered. “He went away in a cab yesterday evening.”

Not knowing what to make of this strange news, hardly believing it, I went into the parlour and asked to see the landlady—who came at once. It was quite true: Bevere had left. Mrs. Long, an elderly woman, plump and kindly, sat down to relate the particulars.

“Mr. Bevere went out yesterday morning, sir, after ordering his dinner—a roast fowl—for the same hour as the day before; two o'clock. It was past three, though, before he came in: and when the girl brought the dinner-tray down, she said Mr. Bevere wanted to speak to me. I came up, and then he told me he was unexpectedly obliged to leave—that he might have to go into the country that

night; he didn't yet know. Well, sir, I was a little put out: but what could I say? He paid me what was due and the rent up to the week's end, and began to collect his things together: Sarah saw him cramming them into his new portmanteau when she brought his tea up. And at the close of the evening, between the lights, he had a cab called and went away in it."

"Alone?"

"Quite alone, sir. On the Wednesday afternoon Dr. Pitt came to see him, and that same evening a young man called, who stayed some time; Scott, I think the name was; but nobody at all came yesterday."

"And you do not know where Mr. Bevere is?—where he went to?"

"Why no, sir; he didn't say. The cab might have taken him to one of the railway stations, for all I can tell. I did not ask questions. Of course it is not pleasant for a lodger to leave you in that sudden manner, before he has well been three days in the house," added Mrs. Long, feelingly, "especially with the neighbours staring out on all sides, and I might have asked him for another week's rent in lieu of proper notice; but I couldn't be hard with a well-mannered, pleasant young gentleman like Mr. Bevere—and with his connections, too. I'm sure when her ladyship came here to fix on the rooms, she was that kind and affable with me I shall never forget it,—and talked to me so lovingly about him,—and put half-a-crown into Sarah's hand when she left! No sir, I couldn't be hard upon young Mr. Bevere."

Mrs. Long had told all she knew, and I wished her good day. Where to now? I deliberated, as I stood on the doorstep. This sudden flight looked as though Roger wanted to avoid people. If anybody was in the secret of it, it would be Richard Scott, I thought; and I turned my steps to St. Bartholomew's Hospital.

I suppose I interrupted Scott at some critical performance, for he came to me with his coat cuffs turned up and no wristbands on.

"Glad to see you, I'm sure," cried he; "thought it might be an out-patient. Bevere?—oh, do you want him?" he ran on, not giving himself time to understand me perfectly, or pretending at it. "Bevere is at his new lodgings near Russell Square. He will not be back here until next week."

"But he is not at his new lodgings," I said. "He has left them."

"Left!" cried Scott, staring.

"Left for good, bag and baggage. Gone altogether."

"Gone where?" asked Scott.

"That's what I have come to ask you. I expect you know."

Scott's face presented a puzzle. I wondered whether he was as innocent as he looked.

"Let us understand one another," said he. "Do you tell me that Bevere has left his *new* lodgings?"

"He has. He left them last night. Ran away from them, as one may say."

"Why he had only just got into them! Were the people sharks? I was with him on Wednesday night: he did not complain of anything then."

"He must have left, I fancy, for some private reason of his own. Don't you *know* where he is gone, Scott? You are generally in his confidence."

"Don't know any more than the dead."

To dispute the declaration was not in my power. Scott seemed utterly surprised, and said he should go to Mrs. Long's the first leisure moment he had, to see if any note or message had been left for him. But I had already put that question to the landlady, and she answered that neither note nor message of any kind had been left for anybody. So there we were, nonplussed, Scott standing with his hands in his pockets. Make the best of it we would, it revolved itself into nothing more than this: Bevere had vanished, leaving no clue.

From thence I made my way to Mr. Pitt's little surgery near Gibraltar Terrace. The doctor was alone in it, and stood compounding pills behind the counter.

"Bevere run away!" he exclaimed at my first words. "Why, what's the meaning of that? I don't know anything about it. I was going to see him this afternoon."

With my arms on the counter, my head bending towards him, I recounted to Pitt the particulars Mrs. Long had given me, and Scott's denial of having any finger in the pie. The doctor gave his head a twist.

"Says he knows no more than the dead, does he! That may be the case; or it may *not*. Master Richard Scott's assertions go for what they are worth with me where Bevere's concerned: the two are as thick as thieves. I'll find him, if I can.—What do you say?—that Bevere would not conceal himself from me?—Look here, Johnny Ludlow," continued Pitt rapidly, bringing forward his face till it nearly touched mine, and dropping his voice to a low tone, "that young man must have got into some dangerous trouble, and has to hide himself from the light of day."

Leaving Pitt to make his patients' physic, I went out into the world, not knowing whether to seek for Bevere in this quarter or in that. But, unless I found him, how could I carry out my promise of writing to Lady Bevere?

I told Miss Deeven of my dilemma. She could not help me. Nobody could help, that I was able to see. There was nothing for it but to wait until the next week, when Bevere might perhaps make his appearance at the hospital. I dropped a note to Scott, asking him to let me know of it if he did.

But of course the chances were that Bevere would not appear at the hospital: with need to keep his head en cachette, he would be no

more safe there than in Mrs. Long's rooms : and I might have been hunting for him yet, for aught I can tell, but for coming across Charley Lightfoot.

It was on the following Monday. He was turning out of the railway station near Miss Deveen's, his uncle, Dr. Lightfoot, being in practice close by. Telling him of Roger Bevere's flight, which he appeared not to have heard of, I asked if he could form any idea where he was likely to have got to.

"Oh, back to the old neighbourhood that he lived in before his accident, most likely," carelessly surmised Lightfoot, who did not seem to think much of the matter.

"And where is that?"

"A goodish distance from here. It is near the Bell-and-Clapper station on the underground line."

"The Bell-and-Clapper station!"

Lightfoot laughed. "Ironically called so," he said, "from a bell at the new church close by, that's clapping away pretty well all day and all night in the public's ears."

"Not one of our churches?"

"Calls itself so, I believe. I'd not answer for it that its clergy have been licensed by a bishop. Bevere lived somewhere about there; I never was at his place; but you'll easily find it out."

"How? By knocking at people's doors and enquiring for him?"

Lightfoot put on his considering-cap. "If you go to the refreshment-room of the Bell-and-Clapper station and ask his address of the girls there," said he, "I daresay they can give it you. Bevere used to be uncommonly fond of frequenting their company, I believe."

Running down to the train at once I took a ticket for the Bell-and-Clapper station, and soon reached it. It was well named: the bell was clanging away with a loud and furious tongue, enough to drive a sick man mad. What a dreadful infliction for the houses near it!

Behind the counter in the refreshment-room stood two damsels, exchanging amenities with a young man who sat smoking a cigar, his legs stretched out at ease. Before I had time to speak, the sound of an up-train was heard; he drank up the contents of a glass that stood at his elbow, and went swiftly out.

It was a pretty looking place: with coloured decanters on its shelves and an array of sparkling glass. The young women wore neat black gowns, and might have looked neat enough altogether but for their monstrous heads of hair. That of one in particular was a sight to be seen, and must have been copied from some extravagant fashion plate. She was dark and handsome, with a high colour and a loud voice, evidently a strong-minded young woman, perfectly able to take care of herself. The other girl was fair, smaller and slighter, with a somewhat delicate face, and a quiet manner.

"Can you give me the address of Mr. Roger Bevere?" I asked of this younger one.

The girl flushed scarlet, and looked at her companion, who looked back again. It was a curious sort of look, as much—I thought—as to say, what are we to do? Then they both looked at me. But neither spoke.

"I am told that Mr. Bevere often comes here, and that you can give me his address."

"Well, sir—I don't think we can," said the younger one, and her speech was quite proper and modest. "We don't know it, do we, Miss Panken?"

"Perhaps you'll first of all tell me who it was that said we could give it you," cried Miss Panken, in a tone as strong-minded as herself, and as though she were by a very long way my superior in the world.

"It was one of his fellow-students at the hospital."

"Oh—well—I suppose we can give it you," she concluded. "Here, I'll write it down. Lend me your pencil, Mabel: mine has disappeared.—"There," handing me the paper, "if he is not there, we can't tell you where he is."

"Roger Bevary, 22, New Crescent," was what she wrote. I thanked her and went out, encountering two or three young men who rushed in from another train and called individually for refreshment.

New Crescent was soon found, but not Bevere. The elderly woman-servant who answered me said Mr. Bevere formerly lived with them, but left about eighteen months back. He had not left the neighbourhood, she thought, as she sometimes met him in it. She saw him only the past Saturday night when she was out on an errand.

"What, this past Saturday!" I exclaimed. "Are you certain?"

"To be sure I am, sir. He was smoking a pipe and looking in at the shop windows. He saw me and said, Good-night, Ann: he was always very pleasant. I thought he looked ill."

Back I went to the refreshment-room. Those girls knew his address well enough, but for some reason would not give it—perhaps by Bevere's orders. Two young men were there now, sipping their beer, or whatever it was, and exchanging compliments with Miss Panken. I spoke to her civilly.

"Mr. Bevere does not live at New Crescent: he left it eighteen months ago. Did you not know that? I think you can give me his address if you will."

She did not answer me at all. It may be bar-room politeness. Regarding me for a full minute superciliously from my head to my boots, she slowly turned her shoulders the other way, and resumed her talk with the customers.

I spoke then to the other, who was wiping glasses. "It is in Mr. Bevere's own interest that I wish to find him; I wish it very particularly indeed. He lives in this neighbourhood; I have heard that: if you can tell me where, I shall be very much obliged to you."

The girl's face looked confused, timid, full of indecision, as if she knew the address but did not know whether to answer or not. By this

time I had attracted attention, and silence fell on the room. Strong-minded Miss Panken came to the relief of her companion.

"Did you call for a glass of ale?" she asked me, in a tone of incipient mockery.

"Nor for soda?—nor bitters?—nor even cherry-brandy?" she ran on. "No? Then as you don't seem to want anything we supply here, perhaps you'll betake yourself away, young man, and leave space for them that do. Fancy this room being open to promiscuous enquirers, and us young ladies being obliged to answer 'em!" added Miss Panken affably to her two friends. "I'd like to see it!"

Having thus put me down and turned her back upon me, I had nothing to wait for, and walked out of the lady's presence. The younger one's eyes followed me with a wistful look. I'm sure she would have given the address had she dared.

After that day, I took to haunt the precincts of the Bell-and-Clapper, believing it to be my only chance of finding Bevere. Scott got a brief note from him, no address to it, stating that he was not yet well enough to resume his duties; and this note Scott forwarded to me. A letter also came to me from Lady Bevere asking what the matter was that I did not write, and whether Roger was worse. How *could* I write, unless I found him?

So, all the leisure time that I could improvise I spent round about the Bell-and-Clapper. Not inside the room, amid its manifold attractions: Circe was a wily woman, remember, and pretty bottles are insidious. That particular Circe, also, Miss Panken, might have objected to my company and ordered me out of it.

Up one road, down another, before this row of houses and that, I hovered for ever like a walking ghost. Now peering in at the oyster shops, and now at the grocers' and bakers', and especially at the perpetually opening door of that bar-room, and at the railway passengers that swung in and out of it. But I never saw Bevere.

Luck favoured me at last. One afternoon towards the end of the week, I was standing opposite the church, watching the half-dozen worshippers straggling into it, for one of its many services, listening to the irritating ding-dong of its clanging bell, and wondering the noise was put up with, when suddenly Richard Scott came running up from the city train. Looking neither to the right nor the left, or he must inevitably have seen me, he made straight for a cross-road, then another, and presently entered one of a row of small houses whose lower rooms were on a level with the ground and the yard or two of square garden that fronted them. "Paradise Place." I followed Scott at a cautious distance.

"Bevere lives there!" quoth I, mentally.

Should I go in at once boldly, and beard him? While deliberating—for somehow it goes against my nature to beard anybody—Scott came striding out and turned off the other way: which led to the shops. I crossed over and went in quietly at the open door.

The parlour, small and shabby as was Mrs. Mapping's in Gibraltar Terrace, was on the left, its door likewise open. Seated at a table, taking his tea, was Roger Bevere; opposite to him, presiding over the ceremonies, sat a lady who must unquestionably have been first-cousin to those damsels at the Bell-and-Clapper, if one might judge by the hair.

"Roger!" I exclaimed. "What a dance you have led us!"

He started up with a scarlet face, his manner strangely confused, his tongue for the moment lost. And then I saw that he was without his coat, and his arm was bandaged.

"I was going to write to you," he said—an excuse invented on the spur of the moment. "I thought to be about before now, but my arm got bad again."

"How was that?"

"Well, I hurt it, and did not pay attention to it. It is properly inflamed now."

I took a seat on the red stuff sofa without being invited, and Bevere dropped into his chair. The lady at the tea-tray had been regarding me with a free, friendly, unabashed gaze. She was a well-grown, attractive young woman, with a saucy face, and bright complexion, fine dark eyes, and full red lips. Her abundant hair was of the peculiar and rare colour that some people call red and others gold. As to her manners, they were as assured as Miss Panken's, but a vast deal pleasanter. I wondered who she was and what she did there.

"So this is Johnny Ludlow that I've heard tell of!" she exclaimed, catching up my name from Bevere, and sending me a gracious nod. "Shall I give you a cup of tea?"

"No, thank you," was my answer, though all the while as thirsty as a fish, for the afternoon was hot.

"Oh, you had better: don't stand on ceremony," she said, laughing. "There's nothing like a good cup of tea when the throat's dry and the weather's baking. Come! make yourself at home."

"Be quiet, Lizzie," struck in Bevere, his tone ringing with annoyance and pain. "Let Mr. Ludlow do as he pleases." And it struck me that he did not want me to take the tea.

Scott came in then, and looked surprised to see me: he had been out to get something for Bevere's arm. I felt by intuition that he had known where Bevere was all along, that his assumption of ignorance was a pretence. He and the young lady seemed to be upon excellent terms, as though they had been acquainted for ages.

The arm looked very bad: worse than it had at Gibraltar Terrace. I stood by when Scott took off the bandages. He touched it here and there.

"I tell you what, Bevere," he said: "you had better let Pitt see to this again. He got it right before; and—I don't much like the look of it."

"Nonsense!" returned Bevere. "I don't want Pitt here."

"I say nonsense to that," rejoined Scott. "Who's Pitt?—he won't hurt you. No good to think you can shut yourself up in a nutshell—with such an arm as this, and—and—" he glanced at me, as if he would say, "and now Ludlow has found you out."

"You can do as much for the arm as Pitt can," said Bevere fractiously.

"Perhaps I could: but I don't mean to try. I tell you, Bevere, I do not like the look of it," repeated Scott. "What's more, I, not being a qualified practitioner yet, would not take the responsibility."

"Well, I will go to Pitt to-morrow if I'm no better and can get my coat on," conceded Bevere. — "Lizzie, where's the other bandage?"

"Oh, I left it in my room," said Lizzie; and she ran up the stairs in search of it.

So she lived there! Was it her home, I wondered; or Bevere's; or their home conjointly? The two might have vowed eternal friendship and set up housekeeping together on a platonic footing. Curious problems do come into fashion in the great cities of this go-ahead age; perhaps that one had.

Scott finished dressing the arm, giving the patient sundry cautions meanwhile; and I got up to leave. Lizzie had stepped outside and was leaning over the little wooden entrance gate, chanting a song to herself and gazing up and down the quiet road.

"What am I to say to your mother?" I said to Bevere in a low tone. "You knew I had to write to her."

"Oh, say I am all right," he answered. "I have written to her myself now, and had two letters from her."

"How do the letters come to you?—Here?"

"Scott gets them from Mrs. Long's. Johnny"—with a sharp pressure of the hand, and a beseeching look from his troubled blue eyes—"be a good fellow and don't talk. *Anywhere.*"

Giving his hand a reassuring shake, and lifting my hat to the lady at the gate as I passed her, I went away, thinking of this complication and of that. In a minute, Scott overtook me.

"I think you knew where he was, all along," I said to him; "that your ignorance was put on."

"Of course it was," answered Scott, as coolly as you please. "What would you?—When a fellow-chum entrusts confidential matters to you and puts you upon your honour, you can't betray him."

"Oh, well, I suppose not. That damsel over there, Scott—is she his sister, or his cousin, or his aunt?"

"You can call her which you like," replied Scott, affably. "Are you very busy this afternoon, Ludlow?"

"I am not busy at all."

"Then I wish you would go to Pitt. I can't spare the time. I've a heap of work on my shoulders to-day: it was only the pressing note I got from Bevere about his arm that brought me out of it. He is getting

a bit doubtful himself, you see ; and Pitt had better come to it without loss of time."

"Bevere won't thank me for sending Pitt to him. You heard what he said."

"Nonsense as to Bevere's thanks. The arm is worse than he thinks for. In my opinion, he stands a good chance of losing it."

"No !" I exclaimed in dismay. "Lose his arm !"

"Stands a chance of it," repeated Scott. "It will be his own fault. A week yesterday he damaged it again, the evening he came back here, and he has neglected it ever since. You tell Pitt what I say."

"Very well, I will. I suppose the account Bevere gave to his mother and Mr. Brandon—that he had been living lately with you—was all a fable ?"

Scott nodded complaisantly, striding along at the pace of a steam-engine. "Just so. He couldn't bring them down upon him here, you know."

I did not exactly know. And thoughts, as the saying runs, are free.

"So he hit upon the fable, as you call it, of saying he had shared my lodgings," continued Scott. "Necessity is a rare incentive to invention."

We had gained the Bell-and-Clapper station as he spoke: two minutes yet before the train for the city would be in. Scott utilised the minutes by dashing to the bar for a glass of ale, chattering with Miss Panken and the other one while he drank it. Then we both took the train ; Scott going back to the hospital—where he fulfilled some official duty beyond that of ordinary student—and I to see after Pitt.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

(To be continued.)

ISAIAH, CHAP. V., VERSE 4.

It was a pleasure great to me, my spreading vine to raise,
Gently to bind each tendril bough, throughout the soft spring days ;
And when upon the budding grape the summer brightness lay
I thought of all the coming joy on the happy vintage day.

I laid good earth about the roots, and silvery waters shed
From trained fountain when the drought o'er all the land was spread ;
The pearly rain flew fast and far—till emeralds seemed to glow,
And diamonds sparkled joyfully on every glistening bough.

O friends, what more could I have done to this fair plant of mine ?
What more than tend from hour to hour the fondly cherished vine ?
And yet—when after patient hope, the pleasant vintage smiled,
'Twas labour lost—love thrown away—behold the grapes were wild !

DORA LYNCH.

THE CHANNEL ISLANDS.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD,

AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND," "THE CRUISE OF THE RESERVE SQUADRON," &c.



PLEMONT.

DOWN through the region of the South Coast: between great stretches of wonderful gorse and heather: skirting the edge of the New Forest with its splendid trees and wild wood paths and endless drives upon soft, luxurious turf beneath whispering, glinting leaves: down through portions of Hants, Dorset and Sussex—a goodly portion and a fair out of this dear England of ours: until we reach Southampton.

It was only three o'clock in the afternoon, and the boat for

the Channel Islands would not start until the witching hour of midnight. So before "daylight died," we reconnoitred our steamer, the *Ella*: settled our berths with the civil and attentive steward: obtained a satisfactory report of the weather from the amiable captain (when were they ever known to give any other, these optimist rulers of the seas?) and safely deposited on board what the Germans would designate as the grosser part of our luggage.

So far so good.

Then back to the South Western Hotel, where we had put up for those few hours in Southampton. We wandered about the busy but not very interesting streets, admired (not for the first time) the old gateway they call the Bar, with its pointed arch, castellated summit, and general look of age, history and decay; and as a last resource, took the tram which conveyed us we knew not whither, and brought us back we knew not how—except that we seemed units in a multitude. The car was made to hold twenty-four people, and not

less than fifty had thronged in. H. and I were reduced to the extremities of herrings in a barrel. But the rain came down in torrents and no one had the heart to remonstrate. We certainly wondered the horses did not strike, and refuse to work under such conditions; but over and over again the dumb brute creation proves itself more patient, sensible and forbearing than man. These horses knew that, however badly off they might be, there is always a still lower depth, and they acted accordingly. That is just where we often fail. We strike out in the dark, and give the fatal plunge, forgetting the risks and uncertainties of unknown evils.

The car did not break down, but landed us very near the hotel. In the reading-room, very thinly partitioned off from the coffee-room, we took the favourable opportunity, as the schoolboys say, of writing letters to those with whom we had left a large portion of our hearts. Undoubtedly the room was warm; but H.—my familiar friend and fellow traveller—is a Salamander, and though a good Christian is none the less a Fire-worshipper. He revelled in the heated air, whilst I, like a fish out of water, longed for more of one's native element.

Suddenly there entered a tall, majestic, strong-minded and imposing lady. Unceremoniously, and without attempting to find out if it were generally agreeable, she propped wide the door and both windows, placed everyone in a thorough draught, and seated herself midway in the current. It blew a strong blast, cold, damp and dangerous. I sneezed nine times. H. declared he felt every symptom of a severe influenza. A third victim was seized with ague, and called for hot brandy-and-water. Even the strong-minded lady herself finished up with a sneeze and a sudden cough, hailed with a chorus of unmitigated and revengeful delight. At the end of twenty minutes, spent in studying Bradshaw, which was evidently too much for her, she rose up to her utmost height, deliberately closed the windows, and departed with a firm step.

Towards midnight we too departed. Passing through the dock gates we saw an illuminated placard announcing "This way to the Jersey boat." The usual scene was in progress. The bustle and noise of shipping cargo; the shouts of men and the rattling of chains; whilst the few glimmering lights, making darkness yet more visible, confused one's vision and rendered the gangway dangerous and uncertain. We found our way to the bridge. The last train from London steamed up with its small complement of passengers and the mail bags, and on the very stroke of midnight the *Elia* went her way.

We had been warned. It was madness to go to the Channel Islands in October. The crossing was always frightfully rough, often dangerous. Sometimes boats were lost, sometimes they had to put back, sometimes they never left at all. Madeira, the Azores, Sicily, even a voyage to the Cape—anything in short would be more sensible, less insane, than crossing to Jersey in the teeth of the Equinox.

But the longer one lives, the more evident it becomes, that if a man wishes to do anything in the world—though it be only the selfish end and aim of pleasing himself—he must to a very great extent go his own way, and be his own adviser. Somewhat perplexed by a multitude of unsought counsellors, I had written to H., who was ruralising in the Norfolk Broads, for his sentiments in the matter. He very touchingly replied: “So that I am with you, I don’t care *where* we go: all places will be equally pleasant and interesting. As to a rough sea, you know that if the ship could safely reach her destination by a series of somersaults, my happiness would be complete.”

So, throwing advice to the winds, we decided upon the Channel Islands. They were not far off, we wished to be at home again in a month; and we wanted rest of mind and body quite as much as change of scene.

Without let or hindrance the *Elia* passed out of the docks into the broad, uncrowded waters. The night was now clear and starlit. Lights flashed around from the shipping at anchor, and from the land by which we still seemed surrounded. From the bridge we followed the dark line of the Isle of Wight, and thought it interminable. Who could imagine all the beauties of nature that lay there concealed under the canopy of night? But at last we were clear even of that, and slightly changing our course, the wind blew so keen and cold that we were glad to turn in. For some hours I knew no more. The terrible sea we had been so warned about was smooth as a lake; the passengers in the cabin reached only the mystic number of seven; the night passed in silence and peace.

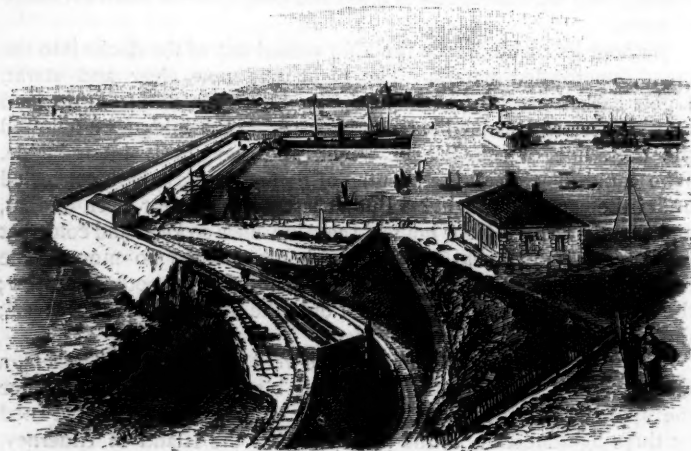
About six o’clock next morning, we were alongside the Caskets, a group of gray granite rocks, bare and bleak, which first announce the approach to the Channel Islands: a dangerous reef, crowned by three lighthouses. Beyond them stretches the Island of Alderney, and all about, sharp rocks rise and bristle out of the water like the pinnacles of unseen temples. It is a dangerous coast, needing care and skill in the navigation thereof.

“In slumbers bound,” I saw nothing of the Caskets that first morning. But H.—who seems to set all ordinary laws of nature at defiance, and can live without food or sustenance, or rest in any shape or form—had been up every hour of the night, watching the progress of the constellations and counting the number of the stars. Here the sea began to be somewhat turbulent, and the waves, he said, surged over the rocks and fell back in great showers of spray. In the midst of the storms that sometimes visit these waters, a day spent on the Casket rocks must be a memorable experience.

We approached Guernsey, at which island the boat touches on her way to Jersey. Herm and Jethou, and, beyond them, Sark—that paradise of islands—lay sleeping in the morning sunshine. Between seven and eight o’clock we passed through the Little Russell—a reef of partly-sunken rocks just outside Guernsey, so dangerous that few

vessels venture to approach or leave the island after dark—and entered the fine harbour. Passengers and cargo were landed, and gave place to everything and everyone Jersey-bound. At the last moment a sort of low-backed Irish car, drawn by a mule, came tearing down the pier, with very Irish-looking occupants. A frantic and emotional parting was followed by two out of the group literally tumbling on board, and soon after eight o'clock the vessel was once more on her way to Jersey.

This is often the worst part of the crossing, and was so to-day. The sea was no longer smooth; white tails were all about; a fresh breeze blew from the north-east. But it was at no time unpleasant, though all seemed sufficiently satisfied with their present amount of



JERSEY HARBOUR.

pitching and tossing—except H. With wind and the waves under his control, we should now have been turning head over heels, and describing circles, and he would have looked on, calm, delighted and indifferent as the crew of the *Flying Dutchman*.

It was all very interesting and enjoyable. Islands rose out of the water on every side. No sooner were we clear of Guernsey, than the influence of Jersey asserted itself. This is the case only on clear days. At other times you lose sight of all land, and might be traversing mid-ocean.

The distance between Guernsey and Jersey from point to point is eighteen miles; but St. Helier is round on the South Coast, and the steamer has another eleven miles to make before reaching that haven. This eleven miles is the best of the journey. We are able to note the rocky shore of Jersey, the slopes and undulations, the points that stretch out seawards and form the bays which perhaps constitute the

chief beauties of the isles. It was especially bright and pleasant that morning. Under the shelter of the land we were in smooth water. The Corbière rocks—a picturesque group of reefs—stood out conspicuously, crowned by a lighthouse. As we rounded the island one feature after another opened up. The warm, sheltered bays slept in the morning sunshine, and the clear green sea splashed upon the shores with long crescents of white foam. The high and rugged rocks of the west gave place to fertile slopes on the south. St. Brelade's Bay—perhaps the prettiest of all the Jersey bays—disclosed a line of houses and a picturesque old church, the oldest church in the islands. Next came St. Aubyn's Bay. The town of St. Helier might be seen rising on the slopes, an apparently confused mass of



ROCKS NEAR ST. BRELADÉ'S.

houses. The harbour stretched out its piers like sheltering arms. In the midst of the waters stood Elizabeth Castle.

The steamer was soon at anchor. The quay was all bustle and excitement. A great crane was straining away and holding up its long neck, preparatory to fishing up all the cargo, animals and luggage, out of the vessel. All down the pier were vehicles of every description, and in numbers sufficient to convey a regiment of soldiers. The season might have been at its height, instead of, happily for us, a record of the past. In front of us, Fort Regent reared its head upon a rock 150 feet above the sea. It is said to have cost the country over a million, and is supposed to be impregnable.

We had heard much of two hotels: the Marine on the Esplanade, and Bree's Stopford Hotel in the town. The former faced the sea, and sounded altogether full of promise, but upon landing, we were told that a travelling circus had encamped under the very shadow of

its walls. Nightly performances enlivened by a brass band, and the applause of appreciative audiences, if not of senates, boded ill for the repose and tranquillity we had not unreasonably hoped to find.

We at once decided upon Bree's Stopford Hotel, and in no way regretted the choice, for it was well-placed, quiet, comfortable, and moderate in its charges. It is undoubtedly the best hotel in Jersey. On the other hand, the "sea view" from the Esplanade is limited. There is the harbour on one side, a point of land stretching out on the other, and in the middle, the garrison of Elizabeth Castle, historically interesting, but not inordinately attractive. At low water the tide goes far out, disclosing a large extent of flat rocks and seaweed—for the tide here has a fall of between forty and fifty feet. You may walk from the shore to Elizabeth Castle at low water, a distance of three quarters of a mile; but at full tide the castle becomes an island. Woe unto him who ventures across when the tide is rising. It comes up so rapidly that before reaching the garrison he may find himself wading in a flood of water.

We set foot in Jersey that Saturday morning before ten o'clock; an exceptionally quick passage; the one instance, it was said, during the whole season, that any boat had come in to time.

The moment you enter Jersey you receive the impression of a thriving, busy, enterprising town. Everyone appears occupied, and all seem well to do. They have turned all their resources to account, and made the most of the advantages they possess in the way of climate and fertility of soil. One hears of people going to Guernsey and Jersey to economise, but this is a past experience and a present delusion. Everything is as dear as in England; many things are much dearer. We found nothing reasonable except the hotels. Their system, for the most part, is to board you by the day or week, and a good and abundant table is generally kept. This refers only to the best hotels in the Islands: and in the sum total, all over the world, they are the cheapest and most comfortable.

As the flyman went through the town we found many of the streets narrow and irregular. Certainly St. Helier possesses little beauty of its own. I was never in any place so honeycombed with thoroughfares, thrown about, apparently, without the slightest plan or order. H., who professes largely the bump of locality, and was consequently overweeningly self-reliant, was for ever leading one astray, and by what he called short cuts turning a ten minutes' stroll into an hour's walk. At length I found him out; his powers were a sham, his self-reliance a delusion. He knew no more how to steer in this wilderness of streets than a mariner knows how to navigate without a compass. And no wonder. They criss-cross each other like the sections of a puzzle, or the lines in a hand. The town is a labyrinth; and half the time it seemed to us that not even the names were put up for guidance.

Nevertheless, the town has a comfortable, well-to-do air; its people

evidently flourish ; many of the shops are worthy of London or Paris. Inns and hotels abound ; their name is legion ; to us they were countless. How they all thrive and flourish puzzled one exceedingly, and is one of the mysteries of Jersey.

Satisfactorily installed at Bree's Hotel, we strolled into the town for a short inspection. The lesson had still to be learnt that it is scarcely less difficult to steer through Jersey than through the twists and turns, the shoals and pitfalls of life's longer voyage. At last we adopted signs and signals of our own construction. Certain shops, for instance, meant particular bearings, north, south, east or west. According to these, we knew which way to proceed.

Thus, the peculiar name of "Wadge" became our north star as regarded the hotel. The moment it loomed in sight from its pleasant corner (it was a confectioner's, and one of my invariable tasks was a futile endeavour to persuade H. that all pastry was an unwholesome indulgence, leading to the bitter waters of Marah), we knew that three turns to the right, and four to the left, and two again to the right would bring us to our haven. By such means as these, and by no other, we were at length able to pilot about Jersey, and to get rid of that unpleasant sensation of being Babes in the Wood.

Strolling that first morning, by chance we came upon the Market Place. Here, as everywhere, prosperity had set its mark. It is a large, square building, with a dome ninety feet high, and room for over a hundred shops and stalls. The fruit stalls were many and enticing. Magnificent grapes and splendid Jersey pears tempted the weak and yielding. Shall we confess it with confusion ? We were unknown ; the market was comparatively deserted ; we invested extensively in some splendid muscats, and disposed of them while wandering from stall to stall. The old fishwives wanted us to buy up all their supplies ; the poultry women, in despair at our obduracy, almost hurled their chickens at our unoffending heads. And I was always the one who had to parry the attacks. H., dark and stern, with his short, torpedo beard, looked the essence of self-will and determination : I, cast in a softer mould, was taken for an easier victim. But appearances are sometimes deceptive.

The women all seemed to speak English and French equally well. Amongst themselves they have a sort of French patois, sufficiently unintelligible to render it an unknown tongue to the ordinary outsider. But they dispense with this when you address them, and reply in a language easily understood. All appeared honest and straightforward ; and if in the last few years their prices have risen from 100 to 500 per cent. according to circumstances, they are only following out the "march of events," treading in the footsteps of the rest of the world. Twenty years ago these islands were primitive ; visited by comparatively few people ; the great travelling age had scarcely dawned ; that marvellous creation of modern times, the tourist, was still unfledged. *Nous avons changé tout cela*, and alas for the change !

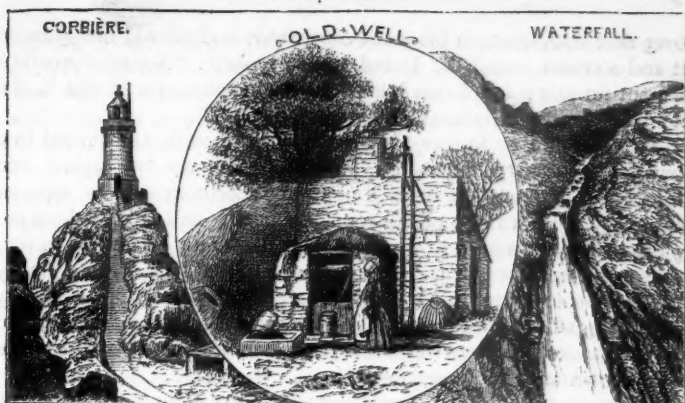
—except for the tourist itself. (One feels that only the neuter gender is here possible.) We may well sing a requiem over the dead past.

We escaped from the market-head and heart whole. The day was unusually fine, and fine days had of late been the exception. The afternoon could not be better employed than by making acquaintance with some portion of the island.

There are two ways of seeing Jersey, as regards driving. Either by hiring a private carriage, or by taking a seat on one of the numerous "cars" that in three days manage to show you all that is worthy of note. This is obtaining a species of bird's eye view of the island, and is a very different matter from exploring every inch on foot, and by long familiarity learning to love and to know the bays with their curves and crescents; the sea that surges up and dashes against the rocks and headlands; the small valleys and ravines that are scattered about. For, after all, the Channel Isles are not to be easily known and appreciated like lands of high mountains, and vast precipices, and huge cataracts, and endless forests. These take the heart and mind by storm, and from the first moment establish an unfading impression. The Channel Islands win their way into the affections by slower degrees.

The cars are somewhat originally constructed. The places are all "outsides," for there is no interior; no shelter from the rain or refuge from the stormy blast. Thus fine weather is *de rigueur*. But their possessing no "inside" is a feature in their favour. You are perched at a considerable elevation, and thus command the country as you drive through it. The hedges are sometimes high, but you are yet higher than they. On the other hand, the trees being frequently low, you often find yourself on a level with, or commanding, the topmost branches. The only objects that sometimes have you at a disadvantage are the cabbage-stalks. These extraordinary productions occasionally grow to the height of fifteen feet, and a six-foot cabbage-stalk is a common occurrence. They might be called the palm trees of Jersey, though certainly without possessing any beauty of their own. Imagine a long, yellowish stalk shooting out of the ground, with notches at intervals resembling the vertebræ of some huge extinct animal, and at the end—the cabbage. In this thrifty land the stalks become an article of commerce. They are manufactured into walking-sticks, and the shop windows display them in variety and abundance. If curiosities and mementoes should be ungainly, many of these stalks perfectly fulfil their destiny. One, twelve feet long, twelve inches in circumference, gorgeously mounted in silver, and varnished to the hue of ebony was H.'s special ambition. He did his utmost to tempt the possessor to part with it, but in vain.

"It is worth more to me, sir, than any sum you could give," said the unflinching shopkeeper. "It brings me innumerable customers; one thing leads to another; and, in short, I attribute all my prosperity to the possession of that cabbage-stalk. My Lord Shuffleshoe was



CORBIÈRE ROCKS.



over here in August, in his yacht *Skyscraper*, and offered me £20 for it and a cruise round the Island, and I replied: 'No, your worship, it's not for sale; and I don't think I would exchange it for the Kohinoor of her most Gracious Majesty the Queen.'

H. gave up any further attempt to buy the stalk, and turned to a bundle of ordinary dimensions. Choosing out the two ugliest and thickest to be found, he insisted upon my accepting one in memory of Jersey. With these two disreputable, awful, and Irish-looking implements of war added to our impedimenta—now become so in very deed—we were compelled to travel about the Islands, and finally through some parts of Normandy, merely to satisfy the idiosyncrasy of a being afflicted with a cabbage stalk mania. I have since heard that it attacks everyone who visits the Channel Islands, and is popularly known as the "Jersey Fever."

To return to the cars. The delighted tourist mounts to his seat by means of a ladder. There are four or five rows of benches one behind another, all facing one way—straight ahead. On each side the driver there is room for two passengers, and these seats are so much the best and pleasantest they might well command a premium. The car has also a conductor, who points out whatever is worth seeing on the road, pilots his charges about at the numerous halting places, takes them upon high rocks and down into deep caves, and makes himself generally useful. Thus these cars, like Cook's Tours, may be said to be "personally conducted." Jehu has his four horses well in hand, and turns sharp corners and bowls over straight roads at a speed at once exhilarating and agreeable.

This is one way of seeing Jersey. It was the best way, most certainly, in this month of October, when the cars had diminished in number until there was only one left to tell the tale, and the passengers were few and quiet. In full season, the time of many cars and tourists, no doubt it is quite another matter.

For ourselves, having attempted both ways, we have a right to give an opinion. On the Saturday afternoon we hired a carriage, on the Monday we patronised the car, and from every point of view the latter was the greater success. We went much faster through the air and we saw a great deal more. We had the carriage for three hours, the car for nearly seven. The charge for the one was nine shillings; the car, for each passenger, exacts the moderate fare of half a crown: and it is as well appointed as a London stage coach.

We started, then, that Saturday afternoon, for Mont Orgeuil Castle, the most important sight of its kind in the island. On our way we passed the Market Place, and I blush to say at the entreaties and even menaces of H. (I remembered the awful cabbage-stalks he had bought that morning) we laid in a further supply of muscats of Alexandria, to be disposed of in the broad, lonely, open country.

Uphill for a time and bearing to the right, we soon found ourselves without the town, on the coast road. Here runs one of the short

Jersey railways. To our right-hand the sea lay stretched in calm, shimmering beauty. The exquisite colour and clearness of the water, most liquid blue, most transparent aqua marine, with here and there long stripes of purple, drew wonderful adjectives and expressions from H., who had never seen it equalled. In truth it was very lovely. It was nearly low water and great boulders and flat rocks, and patches of sand were covered with their abundance of sea-weed. Beyond, rising out of the water, were innumerable small rocks, jagged and pointed, their many shapes and sizes adding much to the beauty of the coast. Many of these are covered at high tide, and one realised the danger of boating here without a skilful pilot at the helm.

The railway ran between us and the sea, and when the short train passed within a yard or two we rather hoped our steady-going horse would take fright and break into a mild gallop, behold we were disappointed. He merely pricked up his ears and shook his mane and went on more leisurely than ever. The road was diversified by wayside houses and small villages. The houses most of them bore names suggestive of an earthly paradise, very pleasing to the fancy and a lively imagination. Val Plaisant, Mon Désir, Mon Orgeuil, Mon Trésor, Mon Plaisir, Belle Vue, Beau Désert, Beau Rivage—with such names as these the inhabitants try to impress upon themselves, and each other, and the world at large, that here reigns all that is beautiful and bright. Perhaps they do well. Contentment is the secret of happiness, and in these calm and placid abodes it appeared to be the keynote of life. Many of the names both of people and places are French, and their pronunciation having been partly anglicised you only catch the proper twists and turns and shades of expression after long familiarity. The result is always perplexing, and seldom satisfactory.

The villages were not infrequent. One was named Pontac, and immediately carried us away in the spirit to South Africa, and to a well-loved friend, who, once undertaking a commission to send home some rich and ripe Constantia, improved the occasion by despatching instead twenty dozen of Cape port—or Pontac—and Cape sherry, which no one would ever condescend to touch, or even to receive as a gift; it therefore remained, and remains, a white elephant. Another village was named Old Five Oaks, after five trees, pointed out by the driver with, it must be confessed, a somewhat shame-faced expression; for they were about the size and substance of small firs. But trees are not the strong point of Jersey. They are diminutive, though often making up in beauty and eccentricity of form for deficiency in size. Here and there you come across a picturesque lane. The trees meet and arch overhead, and intertwine their branches so cunningly and regularly, with so much apparent method, that you might fancy they had been specially trained. The roads are for the most part bordered by hedges only, and thus these occasional lanes form a special and pleasant break in the marked features of the island.

Mont Orgueil was to be the limit of our drive: a fine old castle perched upon a hill overhanging the sea. From a distance it appears to rise out of the water, and looks what it really is, noble and imposing, venerable and somewhat ruinous. But the castle itself is in perfect condition; the ruins belong to a detached portion. It is also called Gouray or Gorey Castle, from the village it seems to guard with jealous eye.

Mont Orgueil is intimately connected with the history of the island. It is said to date back to the time of the Romans, and the detached and picturesque ruin alluded to is called Cæsar's Fort. It has been subjected to repeated attacks from the French, and was taken by them in the 15th century; soon, however, to pass again out of their hands.



MONT ORGUEIL CASTLE.

The years and the centuries rolled on, and Mont Orgueil went through the phases and vicissitudes time inevitably brings in its train. Its walls now resisted sieges, now held captives in its melancholy rooms and dungeons, now passed through romantic episodes, now enjoyed an interval of repose. In 1645 the first Protestant Dean of Jersey and his son were here imprisoned, and lost their lives in attempting to escape. Charles II. is said to have found refuge here, and Queen Victoria visited it with Prince Albert in 1846. The world in the 19th century is no longer what it was in the 15th, and nothing now disturbs the solemn silence and dustladen rooms of this venerable stronghold more formidable than the visit of two quiet travellers, or the less sedate onrush of a Midsummer excursion.

Approaching, the castle looked impregnable, and commanded the sea. Its hoary head crowned the green slopes of the hill on which it stands. The village below reposed in security, and looked more

French, perhaps, than any other part of the island. A small harbour, with a short stone pier, gave shelter to a number of fishing boats, now, at low water, high and dry upon the mud. A small government steamer, connected with the fisheries, alongside the pier, looked a very pretty object, in the pink of order, though bearing the reputation of being very useless at sea.

Through the quiet village which looked sleepy and lifeless, the carriage turned into the narrow road to the entrance. It could go no farther.

The castle, with its gray, massive, hoary walls, here and there ivy-grown, stood before us, an imposing structure. Through the small windows that seemed to gaze at us like eyes in the walls, many



MONT ORGUEIL.

a sad face must have been seen peering seaward, in vain longing for a freedom that never came. We climbed the steep and rugged path into the precincts of the castle; through an open doorway, where any door had long ceased to be, through yet another, until one barred and bolted stopped our progress. Here we should have been at fault, but the custodian appeared, struggling up in our wake, an open sesame in his hand in the form of a bunch of keys, possession of which would have been worth a king's ransom to many a captive in days gone by: would have meant the difference between life and death.

The interior is now bare and empty. Imagination conjures up a vivid contrast between this deathlike silence and the animation, the clash of swords, the martial scenes that reigned there when first the castle was called Mont Orgueil. Ichabod is now its motto; its glory has departed; but with it, happily so have all scenes of terror and

torture, cruelty and bloodshed. The walls are amazingly thick, and may stand as long as the world lasts. The rooms are interesting by virtue of their antiquity, the scenes they have witnessed, the prisoners they have confined. Du Gueslin, the Duc de Bourbon, the Duke of Clarence, brother of Henry V., who gave the castle its present proud title, Sir Walter Raleigh, the great Elizabeth, Charles II., Prynne the Puritan poet, Bandinel the first Protestant Dean of Jersey, all have in turn found shelter within the fortress.

The custodian pointed out the room where Bandinel was confined, and one shuddered on looking down into the rocky depths the unfortunate Dean vainly attempted to defy. From the tower the view was very splendid. The bright green sea, sleeping and shimmering in the October sunshine, stretched far and wide. It might have been a June afternoon. The sloping rocks below Cæsar's Fort were a colossal monument of rugged beauty and grandeur. In stormy weather the sea dashes at their base with terrific force, covering the very walls of the ruin with foam. Yet many an unlucky prisoner must have envied the sea its wild freedom, as he watched the waves roll in and break with a sound of thunder, and almost longed to risk his life amongst them.

Beyond the sea lay the cliffs of France, looking, this afternoon, very near and distinct, suggestive of the pleasant life that may be spent amidst that frivolous but charming people. At our feet lay the snug village and harbour of Gorey; once, more busy and important than now, when the oyster-beds brought forth abundantly, and the people drove a brisk trade. Grouville Bay swept round in a long crescent curve, ending in La Rocque Point. Martello towers are visible at intervals all round the coast; but in these days of comparative peace, they have been turned into store-houses, and dwellings; and for £1 a year a family may inhabit one of these round towers, kings and queens, to all intents and purposes, of their own castle.

The railway stretched parallel with the shore, and at this moment a line of white steam puffed out from the engine, as the train left Les Marais station. We watched its progress up to Gorey terminus. No one got out, and no one got in. The station-master rang the bell as if he would awake the dead, but only a dog barked in response. Away went the train again, back towards St. Helier, with its three empty carriages. Houses and settlements enlivened the shores of Grouville Bay, and the waters were broken by that multitude of small rocks. The "creeping, crawling tide"—here no inapt description—still far out, left bare those long stretches of sea-weed, so largely used here to fertilise the earth. The land rose in steep and cultivated heights, and the driver, in returning, abandoned the coast road, and toiled upwards into the country, to a very perfect and wonderfully interesting Druids' temple.

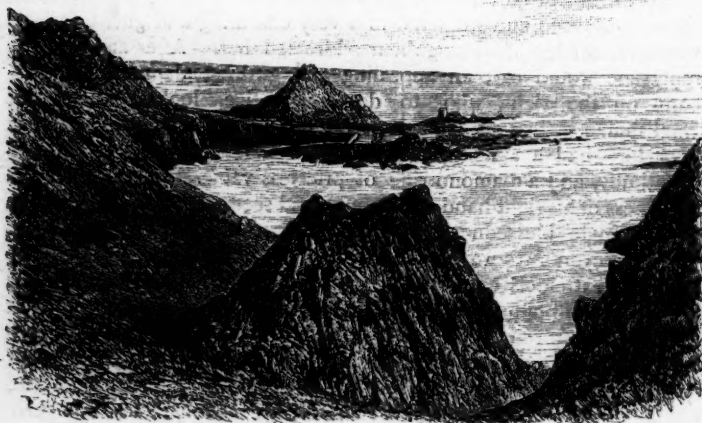
Here we stayed some time absorbed by its influence. Then we went on, now sweeping over the top of a hill, now descending to

the level of the sea, now passing through a hedge-bound, Jersey lane. And always the roads were in wonderfully good order and the hedges perfection. But we were generally below the latter, and this was tantalising and unsatisfactory. Every now and then we came across a great apple orchard, one of the chief features of the island. Never were seen trees so laden with fruit; apples from the pale yellow to the deep red. Many—like the Jersey pears—are sent to England; and many are manufactured into cider. When, at last, we reached St. Helier, twilight was gathering, and a chilly wind was creeping up over the sea, and we were not sorry to get back to our comfortable quarters.

The company at the table d'hôte that night—the dinner was excellent—was amusing. Opposite to us sat an evidently newly-married couple, who had entered well on the meridian of life. Nevertheless, the lady blushed and simpered in a very charming and girlish fashion whenever her left-hand neighbour addressed her. After an inaudible reply she would cast an appealing and gushing glance at her husband on the right, who, to do him justice, looked a sensible Englishman. The old bachelor on the left—he was unmistakably a bachelor—had a smooth, round, red face, a flaxen wig that curled beautifully, and a diamond ring of priceless value. He watched the happiness of his right-hand neighbours, and seemed to feel it a reproach to his single blessedness. Beyond him came a Darby and Joan, whose halcyon days were in the long ago. They could only be described as extremely comfortable. The gentleman was big and broad, and if it were polite, the lady might be described in similar terms. It was pleasant to see the evidently good understanding existing between this couple, who, judging from their age, might long have passed their silver wedding. They were on the best of terms with life and the world, and all the good things it possesses for the fortunate and the prosperous. The gentleman reminded one so much of a public character who in the last few years has become notorious, that we were at no fault for a title whereby to identify him. From his expression we felt that he must be a Radical, and later we found that our instincts had not been led astray. His *cara sposa* evidently appreciated the pleasures of the table. No dish passed her, and it was a true delight to hear her smack her lips after an especially happy effort on the part of the hotel chef. Once, after disposing of a large helping of a sweet dish, she turned to her lord and exclaimed, *pro bono*: "Very good, my dear; uncommonly good! Waiter, bring me some more of that stuff!" And a second supply quickly went the way of the first, and the lady looked a third time longingly at the dish, at that moment retreating, in the hands of a provident and active waiter, through the door leading to unseen regions.

It was a singular fact that we were constantly coming across a happy bride and bridegroom in our progress through the Channel Islands. To-night there were no less than three sets at table, living

for the moment in a fool's paradise, deluded souls dreaming of heaven. Next to the elderly comfortable couple came another newly-married pair, who in the public drawing-room mistook their honeymoon for their days of courtship, and made love to each other in a manner that not even the twilight could conceal or the shades of night excuse. Opposite them sat a French lady and gentleman, who, like many of their countrymen, began their breakfast every morning with bottled beer. It might truly be said that their presence filled the room. Another remarkable personage was a specimen who puzzled us not a little. One thing appeared certain; either he had been insane or he was about to become so. He was generally known by the sobriquet of the Bear. The title was well applied. His manners were an apo-



L'ETAC.

logy for the word. His frown would have terrified Medusa. The waiters trembled at his tones. We speculated as to what he had been, or was, or would become, finally deciding that he must be a very rough specimen of a Cape diamond seeker, or an Australian bush-ranger. And I do not think we were far wrong.

Every night during our stay in Jersey did this curious and mixed assemblage afford us infinite entertainment. It was a study of human nature under varied forms. The comic element prevailed; comical, at least, to us; but the grotesque was there also, the sentimental, and, perhaps, the ridiculous. Yet the traits of each particular set were so marked and startling, that the commonplace was quite absent.

I think we looked forward to that one hour of the twenty-four with as much interest as we did to any other. It was a change and contrast after a day spent amidst the beauties of nature: the crescent bays, where plashed and murmured all that exquisite sea, with its

transparent colours and clear depths; all the grand rocks that make Jersey a place of beauty and of interest. It was also the only hour out of the twenty-four that we came into close contact with the representatives of the English abroad—that experience which grows year by year more startling and miraculous from a specimen point of view. For the rest of the time we were so uninterrupted in our haunts and rambles as to feel happy and fortunate in having chosen this quiet, calm October, for making acquaintance with the Channel Islands.

Sunday, for one of us, was a *dies non*, spent in retirement and the miseries of headache. Monday, the one solitary car was announced for its day's excursion. It looked—under the circumstances of October—quiet and inviting. We secured two seats to the right of the driver, and for the first time in our lives mounted a Jersey car.



ST. PETER'S VALLEY.

Perched on a level with first-floor windows, we dashed through the town. The weather was such as we dream of in Paradise, but very very rarely find on earth. The sky was blue and unclouded; the atmosphere was radiant and exhilarating. If we lost a little in dignity as compared with our Saturday's vehicle, we gained infinitely in pleasure, profit, and health.

For three days we thus drove about and saw Jersey: three days never to be forgotten. We never had three such days afterwards; even when the sky was unclouded, that peculiarly radiant atmosphere was no more. For the time we were in Eden, and then we came back to the world. In this manner we grew to know, almost to love the island. But space fails, and the experiences of those three days must be left to another Paper.

THE BLACK BUOY.

BY ARTHUR W. READY.

"SWIM?" said my grandmother, as we sat around the crackling logs one Christmas Eve. "Every boy and girl should learn to swim. I could swim like a duck when I was a girl, and there came a time when it served me in good stead!"

My grandmother sat bolt upright in her high-backed chair, resting her elbows on the arms, and smiled across at the General, who sat on the other side of the hearth. There was a conscious look in her bright old eyes. My grandfather, pausing in the act of raising his tumbler to his lips, nodded and smiled back again. They were both white-haired, bright-eyed, and fresh-coloured: each saw the other through an effacing medium, which smoothed out wrinkles, restored hyacinthine locks, and blotted out the fifty years that lay between them and youth.

We, the diverse-aged descendants of this stately pair, were grouped in lazy attitudes around the vast, roaring hearth, with its tall, carved chimney-piece; and as we saw the meaning looks that were exchanged between our respected progenitors, we scented a story.

My grandmother hesitated for a moment at our many-voiced appeal, and shook her head; then looked across at the General, who nodded again; and after a little pressing, thus began:

"You know, young people, that you are of good family only on your grandfather's side, and not on mine: for he came of an old and honourable stock, whilst my father was only the master of a vessel that traded between England and the West Indies. He was killed in a sea-fight when I was a child; and I was brought up by my grandfather, who, ostensibly a boat-builder and fisherman, was in reality a smuggler. In those days smuggling meant great risks and enormous profits. It was not only a profitable trade, but it was reputable in a peculiar sort of way. It required great skill and courage. England was always at war in those days, and the smuggler had to run the risk of being snapped up by an enemy's cruiser as well as the chance of falling into the clutches of a revenue cutter. In addition there were the inevitable risks of the sea.

"Thus a smuggler must possess a knowledge of navigation. He had to work into harbour on the darkest nights with the utmost secrecy and despatch. To do that, he must know every inch of his way; be able to distinguish landmarks and buoys in what would seem to the uninitiated to be blank darkness; and to know to a nicety at what times the tide turned, the twists of sandbanks, and the position of sunken rocks.

"There was only one channel leading into the harbour, for the mouth of our little river was choked with sand, and the banks extended out to sea. It was necessary to hit this channel some distance out at sea, and a small black buoy bobbed up and down to indicate its commencement. One side of the harbour was formed by a line of rocks shelving down gradually into the water, and the buoy was distant from the extremity of these rocks about three-quarters of a mile, or a little more. This headland was called the Point.

"The black buoy, a mere speck on the waters, was hard enough for anyone to find in the broad day, but my grandfather never failed to find it in the dark—for, of course, it was only on a moonless night that the smugglers dared to run a cargo. The usual course of proceeding was this: the lugger arrived off our coast at nightfall, lay-to until a signal was flashed from our friends on shore, flashed a reply, found the entrance to the channel, and worked in with the tide.

"I had a very independent kind of life, getting a good deal of book-learning from the old vicar, and passing many hours in the bright sunshine and the free fresh air. I could run a couple of miles, and pull an oar, and swim with the best. The sea had no terrors or difficulties for me, except such as it was a pleasure to overcome. So at sixteen I was a fresh-coloured, free-limbed, and I believe, bright-eyed young maiden, whose only trouble was her long tresses of thick brown hair, and who thought very little of the outside world.

"On a certain day in September, my grandfather being absent and expected back at night, I set off for a long ramble in the country, taking some sandwiches with me for dinner. At nightfall I was returning tired and hungry, when I paused on the cliffs for a moment to take a last look around before striking into the path that led to the village. With a sigh of contented fatigue, I turned homewards, when I recollected that a little suit of blue serge, which I used for bathing, required some trifling repairs. I kept it in a little cave not far from the gully up which our contraband goods used to be conveyed; so without approaching the village, I hastened to the cave by the shortest route. I passed down the gully, slipped into the cave, and felt about for my dress. Having found it, I was just about to come out again, when a strange sound broke the stillness of the night, and I stopped short. Apparently coming from the gully I heard the tramp of feet and the noise of voices, and a queer, little thin sound, but curiously distinct—the clink of steel.

"I peered out cautiously. Two men emerged from the gully. They had long cloaks on, but, by the clank of their arms and the manner of their bearing, I knew them to be soldiers. They were talking in low voices; but I could hear what they said, for the night was very still.

"‘This is the place, sir,’ said one, who seemed to be the elder. ‘The goods are landed here, and carried up this gully. The carts stand at the head of the gully, where we came down.’

"The other, the careless ease of whose bearing, coupled with the deferential manner of his companion, showed him to be an officer, had a paper in his hand. He looked around him, up and down the little ravine, evidently taking in the features of the place.

"'Very well,' said he, speaking in a full, low tone that I well remember. 'I shall post half the men here, and place the rest at intervals between this and the village to stop anyone who attempts to pass. At a quarter past eight the tide turned. At twelve the signal. You undertake the signal, don't you?'

"The sergeant produced a lantern from under his cloak.

"'Here is the signal, sir.'

"'Then order the men down, and place the others as you think best.'

"The sergeant saluted, and clanked up the gully. The officer walked slowly towards the water and stood there at the edge—some distance from me, for the tide was low—with his head bowed and his hands behind his back. Now or never for me to get away. Quick as thought, I slipped out of my hiding-place and hastened up the gully. Horror! at the head of it was a string of dark figures winding methodically down, their heads every now and then bobbing up and down against the twilight sky. The rocks were steep, but not high, and I was half-way up them in an instant. Behind a sheltering ledge I crouched, scarcely daring to breathe, while they marched, tramp, tramp, silently down the ravine.

"They passed out of sight. I heard an order given in a sharp, clear tone, the rattle of arms, and all was still. Then I breathed again. I looked to the head of the gully, and there, athwart the sky, appeared at intervals a black figure. A sentinel was posted there.

"Up to this moment I had only thought of escaping and arousing some of our friends in the village. It would be hard if we could not devise some means of warning the lugger of her danger. Now that hope was gone, for my return to the village was cut off. Still everyone must know what was going on, and would not someone slip out a boat? How could they? The tide was low; the only channel even for a small boat was close to the lower end of the gully, and the soldiers could prevent anyone passing out.

"I covered my face with my hands, and busied myself to think. There could be no reasonable doubt why the soldiers had been brought, twenty miles at least, to our little village. Penal servitude for life! What did that mean? It was no uncommon punishment, I had heard, for a smuggler taken, as my grandfather would surely be, red-handed. For a moment the hope flashed into my head that he might not come to-night. But no! The wind was light and not unfavourable, there was no suggestion of a fortunate storm in the sky, and I knew that the people with the carts had arranged to come, and that all was in readiness. My heart sank within me.

"Suddenly I raised my head and formed a bold resolve. I would

save him. Yes, I! The skill which I had attained for my own heedless pleasure should be put to stern service. I determined that when the lugger showed her signal in answer to that treacherous one from the shore, I would swim out to the buoy and keep myself afloat at the entrance of the channel until I could hail our people and warn them of their danger.

"I never hesitated after I had formed this resolution. I forgot that I was hungry and tired, and began instantly to make my preparations. On the narrow ledge of rock where I now knelt, I undressed and put on my little bathing costume, which consisted only of a tunic and drawers. I made my clothes into a bundle, and stowed them away in a cleft. Then, like a cat, I clambered up the rocks, hiding behind every projection, and keeping a fearful watch upon the sentinel at the head of the gully.

"Fortunately the gully was not very deep. When I reached the top I crept on my hands and feet until I judged I was well out of sight, and started for the end of the Point. I took my time, for the moment of action was long enough distant, and I had to husband my strength. At last I reached the rock from which I meant to dart, and sat down to wait for the lugger's signal.

"I did not know the time, and could only guess it by calculating from the sunset. How long should I have to wait? How long did I wait? Heaven knows, but it seemed an age. I got sleepy from my day's exertions. The night air was cold, too; and my clothing, admirably adapted for exercise, was somewhat scanty for sitting still. Besides, it was damp. The wretchedness of that long watch comes before me now. And, oh! would the slow minutes never pass?

"I waited so long that I believed I must have fallen asleep and missed the signal, and I was on the brink of burying my face in my hands and giving way to despair, when I checked myself — and flash! far out on the dark sea, there it was! I sprang to my feet, every nerve tingling. The moment for action had arrived.

"I paused a moment to take the bearings of the buoy. I knew exactly how it lay from the Point, for I had swam round it often enough. But not in the dark. Not with the water a vast, heaving, black plain, mingling with the black sky.

"But I never hesitated. In I went, and after a few strokes, the sense of vigorous exercise, exultation in physical power and skill, overcame my misgivings. On I went, struggling hard to keep my wits about me, in spite of the horror that would rush over my brain now and again. It was hard work, too, for the tide was coming in, there were breakers in the shallows, and in the channel the tide ran fast and strong. Once I all but gave up. I got out of the channel among the breakers; and the buffeting and banging bewildered me, so that I fell into a sort of panic. I threw myself on my back, and in the very act, thanks to my practised eyesight, I caught sight of the buoy. There it was, bobbing up and down, like a silly black cork.

"I swam up to it and kept close by. It was like a friend in all this wild desolation of heaving seas. But now came the worst watch of the whole. The lugger must pass within hail of me, but what if my strength gave out? For it was ebbing fast. I had been without food for hours. I had walked many miles, and swimming is a most exacting exercise. Still I was not going to give up at the last pinch, and I had my reward.

"A little gleam of parting waves, a black mass coming on, towering blacker than the darkness, and I hailed them. '*White Swan*, ahoy!'

"A voice came from the darkness, '*White Swan* it is; who are you?'

"'Lay-to, and throw a rope over your starboard quarter.'

"The lugger was only about thirty yards distant. I made my last effort and swam to her. A rope was thrown, and they hauled me on board, and I had just time to give my warning before I fell fainting on the deck.

"When I came to myself, the last keg of our cargo was being lowered overboard. We were some little distance up the coast and floats were attached to the kegs so that we might be able to find them again.

"So expeditiously was all this done, that it was only some two hours afterwards that we beat cautiously up the channel with the last of the flood, and cast anchor close to the mouth of the gully. All was perfectly still. We pulled ashore in our boat and stepped on land, when, in a moment, dark figures started up, lights flashed upon us, and we were surrounded by soldiers.

"'In the King's name!' said the officer, coming forward.

"It was a picturesque group, illuminated as it was by the flickering light of the torches which some of the soldiers carried. My tall, old grandsire, with his weater-beaten face and grey hair; the boyish, handsome young officer, bright with scarlet and gold, and steel; the stolid seamen in their blue jerseys and sou'westers; the soldiers with their bronzed faces and glittering accoutrements; and, I suppose, myself, disguised in a suit of oilskins and a big sou'wester that covered my rebellious hair.

"My grandfather said nothing when the young lieutenant ordered the sergeant to board the lugger; and only a twinkle of his keen, grey eye, showed his enjoyment of the scene. The soldiers had to row, and clumsily enough they did it, provoking one of the stolid seamen to a loud laugh, which he instantly suppressed.

"The sergeant was back again pretty soon, his face, formerly red, now purple with wrath.

"'We've been made fools of, sir!' he exclaimed, saluting the lieutenant. "'Nothing on board except some nets!'

"The lieutenant's face fell for a moment; then he looked amused at the sergeant's discomfiture.

"'Search them!' he said. 'We'll make it sure!'

"A couple of soldiers held my grandfather while the sergeant searched him, and found nothing. Nor did the others prove better worth examination.

"I was hiding behind my grandfather's back, hoping to escape observation. But the sergeant caught me by the wrist. My grandfather interposed.

"'There is nothing contraband on that boy!' said he, peremptorily.

"'I'll soon see that,' answered the soldier, grasping my wrist until I could have screamed with pain.

"My grandfather did not strike him, but administered a kind of push with his heavy shoulder that sent the sergeant, big as he was, staggering some yards away. With the loosing of his hold, I slipped and almost fell; off went my sou'wester, and down, alas! came my long brown hair all over me. The young officer instantly stepped between the sergeant and me.

"'I don't think we need search this youngster, sergeant,' he said, in a tone of quiet authority. 'He is not likely to have anything contraband about him. Where have you been to-night?' he added, turning to my grandfather, while I got into the background, greatly confused and conscious that the officer had found me out.

"'Lobster-fishing,' answered my grandfather, composedly.

"'Not much sport, I'm afraid,' said the lieutenant, sarcastically.

"'Oh yes, we caught a few,' answered my grandfather, glancing round at the soldiers' coats.

"The lieutenant was good-humoured, and could take a joke. 'Ah! but they're black when they're caught,' said he, with a smile that showed a very white and even set of teeth.

"'Aye, aye, sir,' said my grandfather, with a twinkle in his eye again. 'But they're red when they're done!'

"The lieutenant laughed outright. 'You've got the best of us this time, Mr. Wilson,' said he, preparing to depart. 'But,' he added in a lower tone, 'you had better be careful for the future. Meanwhile, I am sorry to have troubled you. Good-night.'

"He put himself at the head of his men, gave a sharp, short order, and away they went.

"And away we went. But my grandfather had learnt a lesson. He was a rich man, and gave up the trade from that very night, sold the lugger, and retired into private life."

Here my grandmother paused, and looked at the General with a smile.

"And did you never see the lieutenant again?" enquired a young lady of fourteen, who had long brown hair, probably like grand-mamma's was once.

"My dear," said grandpapa, "I was the lieutenant."

ADONAI, Q. C.

THE STORY OF A WAGER.

I.

"**M**RS. FEATHERSTONHAUGH at home?"

"No, sir."

Mr. Adonais fumbled in his card-case. "Is she quite well again?"

The footman opened his eyes. "Oh no, sir; but the day was so fine she thought a drive might do her good."

A card exchanged hands, and the door of the dainty Park Lane residence closed softly.

Oliver Adonais, Q. C., put back his card-case into his pocket, much relieved, and walked with long, swinging steps down the sun-parched thoroughfare.

The sun was shining on Adonais. It played on his sleek black hat, glared searchingly at the seams of his coat, lit up his reddish-brown hair and moustache, and would have done the same for his eyes had it been able. But Adonais was walking with his head in the air, and his brows knit, and his keen, splendid hazel eyes cast to the ground—for Adonais was thinking.

Sometimes grave, deep, and may be bitter thoughts will pass through a mind, and all that the world sees is a careless face. Sometimes it is just the other way. For here was the famous Oliver Adonais with a forehead as solemn and unfathomable as a sepulchre:—and what were his thoughts like?

"I'm glad they were out," he was saying to himself; "very glad. I don't like them. The men one meets there are—fools or fast; and the women—loud. I spent that evening with them, and I had to call to-day, of course. But there's an end of it. As for Mrs. Featherstonhaugh herself, I don't believe in her illness; simply don't believe in it; she's just as well as I am. Pretty woman enough, but unprincipled and cruel. I don't like her."

And Adonais turned sharp round a corner, and flicked a bit of straw viciously off the pavement with the end of his walking-stick.

"Mr. Adonais, how d'ye do?"

A tweed-coated youth had button-holed him. And he listened forthwith to a lengthy tirade on the bad prospects of the grouse shooting; to a little about a cricket match, and a great deal about a cricket club; then promised a handsome contribution to the latter, nodded a laughing good-bye, and sped on his way again. And lo! the sun-burnt face and shooting jacket passed like a dream from his mind—thoughts when they get into one's head are so difficult to get out

again sometimes—he took up the thread where he had let it fall, and went on thinking of the Featherstonhaughs.

“Don’t like them; out and out Americans they are, and just the type of Americans I don’t care about. The husband does seem a quiet, well-intentioned individual; but as for her—pretty woman enough, but —— Hillos! and this is the Featherstonhaugh carriage, if I’m not mistaken; yes.” Here he performed the manual labour of taking off his hat. “Thought a drive might do her good,” and he smiled an amused smile to himself; “hope it has. That must be the sister, she spoke about, with her; very beautiful, but hard as a stone, I should say. Wonder who that fellow on the seat opposite was; I’m sure I know his face, and he looked as if he knew me.”

“Well, Oliver, how d’ye do? Going down town, are you? Then we’ll go with you, of course.”

And Oliver Adonais, Q.C., smiled resignedly as a pair of noisy school-boy cousins took boisterous possession of him.

Meanwhile the open barouche, with its C-springs and high-stepping horses, swept round the corner of the street. The younger of the ladies stifled a yawn. “Who was that?” she asked lazily.

“Adonais, Q.C.,” replied Mrs. Featherstonhaugh.

She opened her languid eyes slightly. “Who?”

The dark-complexioned man sitting opposite, answered her this time. “Oliver Adonais, Q.C.”

“Adonais! What a strange name!”

He leaned back in his seat. “A good name; they are the oldest family in Loamshire; and there’s another branch in the north of England. I have heard there are Adonaises in Ireland, but ——”

She moved impatiently. “Oh, if you please—enough. The very best of you English aristocrats, if one sets you off once on the subject of pedigree, there’s absolutely no stopping you.”

He laughed. “The pedigree of Oliver Adonais might be physiologically interesting: he has no heart.”

Gabrielle Ryan smiled a little sarcastically. “No heart! But neither have a good many other people. Neither have I, for instance.”

The bold blue eyes opposite studied her calmly. “Possibly not; sometimes I think I have none myself. But pardon me, Gabrielle; I wasn’t talking of such as you and I: few people would suspect us of having hearts; we don’t look like it. The strange and wonderful thing is, to know that a genial, amiable, happy-go-lucky individual like Adonais—and Oliver Adonais is all that—the strange and wonderful thing is, that verily and indeed he—has—no—heart.”

Miss Ryan coloured slightly.

“In the first place, your politeness excels itself to-day,” she returned. “And, secondly, how can you answer for Mr. Adonais’s want of heart? How should you know anything about it?”

His eyes flashed mischievously. “I will tell you. Ten years ago

Oliver Adonais had newly joined the bar; to-day he is perhaps the most rising pleader in England. Then he was wealthy, and—an Adonais; to-day he is still an Adonais, of course, and—wealthier. Now, during these ten years—and this is the important part—during these ten years, the mothers and daughters of this London world have thought, planned, schemed and toiled to find out the heart of Adonais. And with what result? Total defeat: ergo, Adonais has no heart."

Mrs. Featherstonhaugh interposed now, impatiently. "Mr. Vaughan," she exclaimed, "listen to this: I was out at dinner the other evening, and in the drawing-room afterwards, Mr. Adonais formed the topic of conversation. His abilities and prospects were eulogised by everybody: and one old, white-haired gentleman, added—what do you think?"

"Well, what?"

"This: 'He has better than all that,' he said; 'he has the truest heart in England.'"

Roland Vaughan arched his eyebrows incredulously. "Where does he keep it, then?"

"Not on his sleeve evidently, as some do," said Miss Ryan: "to have it played with, and tossed aside at will, at the fancy of every passing breeze."

"Thank you, Miss Gabrielle," he returned, bending his head slightly. "I recognise myself to a nicety. However, if Mrs. Featherstonhaugh will excuse me, I must keep to my opinion: Adonais has no heart."

Mrs. Featherstonhaugh shook her head with the irritability of a woman who cannot brook contradiction. "He has a heart, of course," she remarked, shortly. Mr. Vaughan raised his hand quickly to his dark moustache, to conceal a sudden smile of amusement.

"Well, Mrs. Featherstonhaugh, suppose we ask your sister to find it out for us?—we might settle the dispute in that way. Gabrielle, does your pride need humiliation? Defeat means humiliation to you, does it not? I can promise you defeat."

"Mr. Vaughan—you are positively rude! And if," continued Gabrielle, her proud lips curling scornfully, "if I succeeded, whose, pray, would be the humiliation then?"

"Why mine; and his," laughed Mr. Vaughan.

"Yours alone," she retorted, beginning to take the matter seriously.

"Ah well; perhaps so. But I do not fear: you would stand no chance with Oliver Adonais."

Now fairly roused, Gabrielle raised herself with sudden energy.

"It is a challenge," she cried. "Before long I will have him at my feet."

Mr. Vaughan glanced at her with a mocking smile. "Pardon me," he said; "I am far from underrating your powers, but you never will. Or if you do, I promise to own myself most grievously mistaken in my knowledge of men and human nature."

"And what else?"

"What else? I will present you with a pair of gloves."

"Very well: it is a bet. I shall accept them, but on condition that you own yourself mistaken, and more than that—humiliated."

He laughed again. "To the dust, Miss Gabrielle," and a gleam of open admiration came into his bold eyes, as they rested on the pale, scornful, most lovely face opposite to him.

Mrs. Featherstonhaugh, who had listened to the conversation in surprise, flushed angrily. "Mr. Vaughan," she said, "as Gabrielle's future husband, how can you for a moment encourage anything so unprincipled and cruel?"

He leaned forward, and arranged the thin rug carefully over her.

"My dear lady," he laughed, "pray don't excite yourself—you forget that thereby hangs the whole kernel of the dispute. I hold that Adonais has no heart; if this be so, where is the cruelty?"

"And Gabrielle has really your sanction to do this?"

"Gabrielle and I understand each other perfectly. Do we not, Gabrielle?"

"Why, Claire, it is only for a little amusement," said the young lady.

Mrs. Featherstonhaugh stifled a sigh. "A little amusement! And what about the cost?"

Roland Vaughan crossed his arms, and looked at her. "The cost of Gabrielle's humiliation?"

Gabrielle drew herself up. "At the cost of yours, you mean," she returned; "and a pair of gloves."

"Ah, no," he said, for something in the word as applied to himself displeased him. "We can leave humiliation out of the question, then. No; all for a pair of gloves, Gabrielle." And he held his own suddenly in the air as the carriage drew up at the door-way.

She hesitated, and laughed. "Very well; all for a pair of gloves."

II.

"QUEER thing altogether; queer of Vaughan to call on me. We were college friends, it's true; but——after so many years!"

Mr. Adonais, as he speaks, is in evening dress, with the street lamps flickering in on him through the rain-bespattered windows, and the wheels of his hansom rattling a noisy accompaniment. His well-cut face wears an expression half-puzzled, half-vexed, and he leans back on the dusty cushions and gives himself up to his musings.

"And I had made up my mind to have nothing more to do with the Featherstonhaughs. They may be very nice, of course; but the thing is, I don't like them; nor the people one meets there. Roland Vaughan is certainly not a fool, like most of their male acquaintances, but he is hardly the man a steady-going fellow can have much in common with: now at least. At college it was different."

And Adonais laughed softly; and his thoughts swept back through a dozen years or so of hard work, physical and mental, and he fancied

himself once again in his Oxford rooms ; the sun streaming in through the open windows, and the summer breeze redolent of stock and mignonette ; then in that other season, a roaring fire in the grate, frost-covered panes, and the snow falling heavily and silently outside. Now in one scrape, just before the commemoration ; now in another, and again in another. And wherever these thoughts of Adonais fell, the same bold blue eyes, and dark face, always stood out in prominence.

"Vaughan was daring," he mused, "and fascinating ; and the great thing about him was his invincible determination. He had a hard heart, though ; oh very ! for I remember what he did to that poor little undergraduate." And here Adonais seemed to fall into deep and rather sad thought. And a carriage rolled past his cab, and two heads were stretched forward, and one voice said to another : "There's Adonais, the Queen's Counsel, going out to dinner." But Adonais did not know it. For his thoughts were far away and his keen eyes had lost their keenness ; they were looking straight before him, out through the maze of raindrops to the ears of the jaded horse, bobbing up and down in the thickening gloom.

"Very hard ! like the Featherstonhaugh females for that," and he smiled to himself. "But I suppose he must be related to Featherstonhaugh ; he spoke as if he were when he brought the letter of invitation. For the sake of old times I couldn't have refused : but I don't like them, all the same."

The hansom stopped at the door in Park Lane, and he went up the wet steps, and into the brilliant hall, and from thence to the door of the drawing-room. The footman opened it and announced him. A rustle of satin, and Mrs. Featherstonhaugh's pale face—a little paler than usual—was turned towards him, and a limp hand was held out.

"How do you do, Mr. Adonais ?" she said feebly.

"How do you do ?" rang out the genial voice of Adonais. "Are you—ah—better ?"

"I am always weak," and she moved slightly to make room for the outstretched hand of her husband ; and then turning abruptly towards a figure on an adjoining couch : "Mr. Adonais, this is my sister Gabrielle."

An involuntary flash of surprise and admiration came into his eyes ; but he dropped them quickly, and bowed low to the beautiful girl before him.

"How are you, Mr. Adonais ? Terrible weather, isn't it ?" And in this commonplace way, Gabrielle Ryan opened hostilities on the heart of Adonais.

He looked down at her comically : "I think we've had about one fine day this season."

She raised her long, dark eyes. "Yes, one," she answered. "I know we've had one ; the day I first saw you was a fine day. We were driving and I asked your name, and I thought it such a strange name—Adonais."

She said the word slowly, pronouncing each syllable by itself, and if Adonais did not notice that it was like the changing tones of a bell, he might have done so. But Adonais was a man of the world; he recognised at once—just as he had done many and many a time before, and just with the same inward amusement—the opening attack of an enemy. He did not know, of course, that his great heart lay in one scale, and a little pair of gloves in the other; but this he did know—that Miss Gabrielle Ryan condescended to flirt with him.

"I have rather an objection to the name," he laughed; "it is too ambitious. It is the most ambitious name I know; and, you see, it is apt to make its bearer ridiculous."

Gabrielle clasped and unclasped her white fingers thoughtfully. "I understand you," she said. "I had a friend in New York, L'Amour; and Love and Truelove are common names where I come from. I used to think these rather ridiculous; but Adonais sounds so—very different."

He laughed again, and shot a quick keen look at her from his smiling eyes. "Yes; it is possible to think of these others as abstract terms; but Adonais is so much more personal."

"How d'ye do, Adonais?" Roland Vaughan had come slowly into the room, with that half-slouch, half-lounge familiar to everyone who knew him, and—a curious look on his face—was standing beside them.

Adonais turned. "Well, Vaughan, how are you? Do you know, I fell into a reverie upon olden days on my way up here."

"Not a very pleasant one for you, I should say, eh?" laughed Mr. Vaughan, but there was something of a sneer in his laugh. Adonais drew himself up slightly.

"It was *not* wholly pleasant. Miss Ryan, I fear we used to be—scapegoats."

Vaughan leaned back on the mantelpiece. "I expect we were," he cried. "I have seen very little of you lately, Adonais. The fact is," he added suddenly, "I went on in the same old path and you struck out another. I think that's just about it."

Adonais smiled kindly up at him. "Ah, well, the paths may meet again some day—who knows? May they not, Miss Ryan?"

She lifted her eyes, and looked from one to the other of them.

"Yes, the two may run together for a while." There was meaning in her tone; Vaughan laughed shortly and turned suddenly away. Adonais bent gracefully towards her.

"The General Election approaches, and hints are dangerous. Now Miss Ryan, do you mean that I've designs on Vaughan's borough—Oh, dinner!" and he stopped abruptly as the door was thrown open. "I believe I take you in."

A long white table, sparkling with glass and silver; bright masses of colour and dark heavy foliage here and there; a pale soft light from the lamps and candles shining over all. It was a pretty sight; and

Adonais—listening to the splutter of rain on the window outside, as opposed to the pleasant-toned talk of the guests, and the soft rustle of the ladies' dresses, as they swept through the hall—made up his mind that, after all, dinners at the Featherstonhaughs were not bad things; and that it was just as well he accepted the invitation Vaughan had brought to him.

When they were seated, Gabrielle Ryan turned to him. "Speaking of Mr. Vaughan's borough—has he any chance of getting in again, do you think?"

Adonais evaded the question. "The General Election is at hand and—Vaughan's eyes are upon us."

She smiled slightly. "But seriously, Mr. Adonais—has he any chance?"

He bent his head over his plate. "Seriously, Miss Ryan, I cannot say. One hears such conflicting reports about things that it is not safe to believe any of them."

The diamonds round her beautiful neck flashed in the lamp light.

"That is true," she answered, thoughtfully. "One does hear conflicting reports about things; and about people."

Adonais looked down at her. "People exaggerate about things, and about other people," he said; "some the good, some the evil. It is that which causes the confliction."

Gabrielle turned, and raised her steady, long-lashed eyes to his. "I do not know. What can you think of this? It is a case in point. At the same place, at the same hour, I heard: first, Mr. Adonais, that you had no heart; and again, that yours was the truest heart in England."

Adonais, man of the world though he was, was taken by surprise. The colour deepened on his forehead; for once in his life he racked his brains in vain to find a suitable answer. After a minute, he laughed.

"Well, Miss Ryan," he said, slowly, "that is, as you say, an example of what I was telling you; some have exaggerated the good, and some the bad." Then, with a short, quiet clearance of the throat, which acted as a full stop to that part of the conversation, "May I pass you the salt?" he added, rather coldly. For, to tell the truth, besides being surprised, he was just a little disappointed and shocked that a pretty, well-bred woman should have done anything so singular and startling as to repeat these personalities to him.

Startling—that was just it. Like many another man, he hated to be startled. It was disappointing, and puzzling. He answered a question from his opposite neighbours with rather unnecessary minuteness; then suddenly put a query in turn, the answer to which he certainly did not care to know. For the puzzled feeling gathered over him. He began to ask himself, and by-and-by he could do nothing but ask himself, what was the meaning of Gabrielle Ryan's having said what she did say. What had she meant? and how should he, Adonais, receive it? This stately, dark-eyed beauty, was no ingenuous

school-girl; that he knew: but she was an American; and American women—let them be charming as they may, American women do, and ever will do, odd things sometimes. If that were all, he could afford to be genial over it; but if she had deliberate designs of attracting him to her, why he objected to any such bold hostilities.

At any rate it was rather amusing; and with a half smile he turned his eyes drolly upon her. A strange look came into them as he noted the downcast lip, and the colour coming and going on her round cheek. For never had Gabrielle looked or felt more crestfallen. She had failed ignominiously, and she knew it. He bent kindly towards her. "And so there was a dispute about my heart?"

She hesitated. This man seemed to read her through and through.

"Yes."

"And may I ask how it was decided?"

"Mr. Adonais, it was *not* decided."

"Ah! and was the matter really allowed to rest on such frightful uncertainty? What folly!"

She laughed feebly. "The decision was deferred, Mr. Adonais."

He shot a keen look at her again. "And meantime the mystery would have to be solved?"

"Oh yes, of course," she stammered, playing with her bracelet uncomfortably.

He laughed, now really amused. "And who was to solve it, I wonder?" he asked, turning his face to her. "Perhaps you?"

This time it was Gabrielle who flushed to the eyes; all self-possession utterly forsook her. What should she do? Where should she look? How should she answer? Her thoughts were whirling in mad confusion. To be convicted—she, proud Gabrielle—to be convicted, in indirect language, it is true, but still convicted of having designs upon a heart! And, that, by the man whose heart she had undertaken to capture! And this in the presence of a London dinner-party! Roland Vaughan had prophesied humiliation; surely this was something worse.

She turned suddenly towards him, the most abject entreaty written on every feature of her face.

"Mr. Adonais!" she said; "Mr. Adonais—please let us talk of something else."

He bowed politely. "Certainly. I think we began this evening with the weather: can you suggest another subject? or may I? Do you know, I have to make a speech at a provincial flower-show to-morrow, this said weather permitting; and I had just made up my mind to ask if you would tell me the names of a few of these flowers on the table—that I may not appear so totally ignorant, as I am—when you startled me. Perhaps you will help me now?"

Gabrielle turned her face once again to him. "Oh, yes!" and her voice struggled for calmness. "That beside you is a pelargonium."

"And opposite?"

"Hydrangea."

"Ah! By the way, what sort of flowers have you in Florida? That might come in so usefully."

"In Florida," she repeated mechanically: and for one instant there was a beautiful look in her eyes which neither Adonais, nor his heart, nor the flowers brought there. "Yes, Florida is a lovely place. Oh, and the flowers?—there are many flowers. I remember one, long-shaped and blue as a Florida sky. It grew by thousands about the banks of the river at the foot of our garden; and in the summer evenings my sisters and I used to stray up and down, and sit amongst it, to revel in the sweetness of its perfume. Mr. Adonais, have you ever been in Florida?"

"No," he answered, and his eyes rested very kindly on the girl's pale face, its ever-varying expression struggling betwixt victory and defeat, as she strove to regain the mastery over herself. "But that was a charming little bit of description. I wish you would tell me more about it."

So the dinner passed on. Many voices talked and laughed; attendants' footsteps hurried softly to and fro; the glasses and the plates chinked; and the flowers drooped just a little in the heat and light; and Gabrielle spoke, and Adonais listened. When Mrs. Featherstonhaugh rose, Adonais would fain have gone on listening; for Gabrielle had spoken as she seldom did—from her heart. She was away among the orange groves and the citrons, the sweet memories of the past. She had forgotten all about Adonais' heart, and the pair of gloves; almost about Adonais himself.

He smiled more than once, over his wine and walnuts, at the thought of what she had revealed to him about that heart of his. So this was what the world said of him! Well—was it true, any part of it? Had he no heart? Had he the truest heart in England? Roland Vaughan asked his opinion on some political question, and he gave it, and cracked another walnut; and went on with what he was thinking about. Had he the truest heart in England? Of course Adonais did not ask himself such a question seriously; but he found it pleasant to wonder in a half-joking, half-dreamy way; and to go over his own surprise again in his mind; his surprise when Gabrielle said the words, and looked so fixedly and steadily out of her grave dark eyes into the depths of his.

He did not quite understand what she was thinking of; what she had meant by coming out so flatly with it all. But he did not wonder very long about that: the laughter so soon welled-up at the thought of all that followed. "To say I have no heart," pondered Adonais; "that's wrong, perhaps: then—I have the truest heart in England? And Miss Gabrielle is to decide the dispute, is she? Ah well! I must speak more about that to her anon."

And when they rose in their turn, and he had gone with the rest into the long drawing-room, his eyes went straight to the calm graceful figure at the further end of it. He made his way there and bending down, spoke.

Ah, but would he have done it?—would he have spoken had he known the storm that was raging under the veil of a dignified carriage and a pale grey princess robe, which shone and shimmered like the waters of a Highland loch at dawn? If Gabrielle had forgotten, just for a little, that she had staked on the heart of Adonais, and so far had been humiliated, she remembered it all now with more than redoubled force. There was something in her better nature urging her to give up the heart of Adonais and the gloves for ever; but the thought of her own defeat and ignominy, and, above all, the thought of Roland's taunts, made the breath come hard and fast, as if it stifled her. It had been said of Roland Vaughan, that if his hatred was a bitter thing, his jeer was a worse, and harder to bear; and Gabrielle Ryan would have told you that this was true. She knew the look in the bold eyes, and the turn of the hard mouth—the eyes and mouth of the man she had promised herself to. She knew it; and, making an effort, cast aside all better thoughts. She would win the pair of gloves—and the heart of Adonais.

He had made his way to her, and was bending down to speak.

"My heart, Miss Ryan—I have been thinking about it: what are you to tell them about my heart?"

The passing weakness had flown; she raised her pale face to his.

"What shall I tell them?" she answered gently.

"Well—is it true, do you think, that I have none?"

"I—do not think so."

His eyes gleamed a little mischievously. "When must the dispute be decided?"

This time she neither changed colour nor drooped her face from his. "At my leisure, I suppose."

Adonais hesitated a moment before replying. "Then the answer may wait?"

She smiled. "Oh, yes. It may wait, of course."

The guests were gone. Adonais trod the wet pavement, for the rain had ceased, and it pleased him to walk, and indulge his thoughts. And Gabrielle on her way up to her bedroom was stopped on the staircase; stopped twice.

Once, a woman with a cold white face, just touched the girl's brow with her lips. "Good-night, Gabrielle. Have you—have you no mercy, child?"

She opened her eyes. "Mercy, Claire?"

"Yes; mercy on Mr. Adonais. Wait a minute: I am so weak and tired. If you have no mercy for his sake, have a little for mine."

Gabrielle hesitated a moment, and passed on. "Claire! how can you be so ridiculous!"

A little further up, she was met again. A hand was laid upon her shoulder.

"Well, Gabrielle, are you tired? I saw you were doing your best

for the pair of gloves, but you didn't make much of it. It will end as I said it would."

Then he kissed her and said good-night; for she was to be his wife: and she passed on again, shaking her head half in scorn, half laughingly. After all, she did love him in a way. But when he had turned alone into the smoking-room he threw up the gas with an impatient jerk, and down went a bundle of cigars upon the table.

"Dangerous," he muttered to himself; "far too dangerous. Fool that I was to propose such a thing! That fellow Adonais, if he dare only!—or Gabrielle either ——"

A long half hour of doubt, of heavy striding to and fro in the room; then he turned the gas slowly down again.

"She never *would* dare—that. And for the rest—what does it matter?"

III.

THE carriages roll along, the people hurry to and fro on the pavement, the church clocks chime in the distant steeples; and the afternoon sun glares down on all the toil and turmoil, and plays with the reddish-brown hair and moustache of Mr. Adonais. He is in Oxford Street—walking with long, swinging steps, and thinking as usual.

What were his thoughts like? and where was the heart of Adonais? Gone. The heart was gone. He had given it to a girl with grave, dark eyes, and a beautiful face; a girl with whom he had latterly spent much of his time. It was gone for ever.

"She loves me," he was saying to himself. "Adonais, she loves you. Gabrielle loves you! The roll of the carriage wheels echoes it, the footsteps of the people repeat it to me, and the clocks and the bells chime it out to me. Oliver Adonais, Gabrielle loves you. Each house I pass takes life and says it to me—always the same; and every street I turn into breaks out anew, but always with the same—Gabrielle, loves you. They must know—I must know; they cannot be wrong—I cannot be wrong—you *do* love me, Gabrielle: we cannot both be wrong:—you do love me."

A beggar child asked him for a penny, and he gave her half-a-crown. A broken-down friend stopped him timidly for the loan of a pound, and he promised him ten. Well, it was for the sake of Gabrielle. A painter's boy brushed roughly past him, and stained his coat-sleeve a brilliant red; but Adonais walked on with a smile, thinking that here was something for Gabrielle to laugh at. Oliver Adonais, Q.C., with a painted coat in Oxford Street!

Meanwhile a carriage stood at a doorway. Inside sat a girl with a beautiful face, and grave dark eyes that saw—yet without seeing—what was passing around her. She was there herself, but her thoughts were not there. They were with Mr. Adonais! Gabrielle Ryan in dreamland; dreaming of Adonais!

And her dreams ran thus: "I love him. This is your punishment,

Gabrielle Ryan—you love him. This is the end of your boastful intrigue. And he has given you his heart: the truest heart in England! he loves you. It is your heart now; and what must you do with it? not crush it. This is the end of it all; you have promised yourself to Roland Vaughan, and you must keep to your promise. Oh misery! is there no hope? even yet is there not any hope? None; you must keep to your plighted word. You know Roland Vaughan; you know what he has done for your father, and mother, and sisters, all for your sake; with a sneer on his lips, still all for your sake. And besides, listen: you dare not give him up; you dare not, Gabrielle Ryan. Oh misery, misery! and I love you, Oliver, as man was never loved."

Ever hurrying nearer, at last he is close. She sees him, and bends suddenly and eagerly forward.—"Mr. Adonais!"

"Gabri— Miss Gabrielle, how are you?"

"I am quite well."

Then comes a pause and they look at each other; the words take long to rise sometimes when hearts are full. Gabrielle seizes on the first thing which strikes her.

"Mr. Adonais! Look at your coat!"

"Yes; somebody has been painting it for me."

"But how? What a pity!"

"Oh no, I rather liked it; it brought things to my mind." She looked at him wonderingly.

"What things?"

He smiled. "Well, I can't tell you exactly. Perhaps the pale blue flowers that grew by thousands about the river at the foot of your garden; the flowers amongst which you and your sisters used to sit in the summer evenings to revel in the sweetness of their perfume."

She laughed and coloured slightly. "Now that is absurd, Mr. Adonais!" and, glancing hastily round: "My sister is in one of these shops. Where are you going? Can we drive you anywhere?"

The sunshine laughed in his eyes. "Thank you; but I don't know where I am going exactly."

Mrs. Featherstonhaugh was coming out; Gabrielle turned to her. "Claire, here is Mr. Adonais. He was hurrying along rapidly, although he doesn't know where he is going, he says." And all of a sudden, because her heart was beating wildly, and she was struggling for calmness, struggling to quell the misery which was ever there, and to still the flash of joy now illuminating it; suddenly, because these things oppressed her, and would have an outlet, Gabrielle Ryan burst into a rippling peal of laughter. And he, knowing not what had caused it, laughed too. And Mrs. Featherstonhaugh stood, pale and cold as an icicle, between them.

"The fact is," said Adonais; "the fact is, I was going to call upon you, Mrs. Featherstonhaugh."

What could she do? "Will you drive home with us now, then?"

"I should like to," and he smiled at Gabrielle. "And are you better?" he asked, as he helped her in.

"I am always weak," she answered: and she leaned back in the carriage, and looked coldly and haughtily at him. Mrs. Featherstonhaugh didn't like him, Adonais fancied: but Gabrielle did. And the keen hazel eyes of Oliver Adonais blazed and burned with love and admiration, as they rested on the beautiful face opposite him. "Oh Gabrielle, Gabrielle!" She was all he could think of, and the carriage rolled on, and two women were sitting in it with sorrowful hearts. Whose was the sorrow hardest to bear?

Adonais sat down to tea with them in the sombre drawing-room, rich colouring around him, glittering Dresden and Sevres china brightening the gloom up here and there. The end was coming near. Gabrielle knew it, and trembled; talking the while of the weather, and the last race, and the newest book, and the pictures of the year, and drinking tea out of the dainty tea-cups, just as usual until at last there was a pause in the conversation, and Adonais deliberately faced Mrs. Featherstonhaugh. "Your sister promised last night to show me that collection of coins in the library," he said; and, turning himself slightly, "and you forgot to do so, Miss Gabrielle. May I ask to see them now?"

Mrs. Featherstonhaugh's face paled; but Gabrielle rose, calm and self-possessed. The end had come at last; well, it was better that it had—she would bear it.

Side by side through the broad hall, the stained glass of the windows throwing beams of coloured light upon them, they passed into the library. Mr. Adonais shut the door and turned to her. "Gabrielle!" he cried.

The sharp snap of a glass door beyond, opening quickly, was heard. A moment's hesitation, and Ronald Vaughan, darkness on his face, came forward from the conservatory and stood beside them.

"How d'ye do, Adonais. Sorry to interrupt you, I'm sure, but I thought it was a good opportunity to ask you for your congratulations. You never have given me them, you know."

Mr. Adonais stared at him. "My congratulations!"

"Yes. You know, don't you, that Gabrielle is to marry me? Gabrielle has told you that, of course."

Adonais leaned suddenly back on the book-case. "What do you mean?" he said abruptly—and his face had grown so white, white to the lips, that even the cruel eyes looking at him softened in mercy.

"Why, Adonais, I mean that Gabrielle is engaged to me; has been engaged to me for ages. We shall shortly be married now. And you did not know it!"

The walls of the library, and Vaughan, and Gabrielle—Gabrielle with her marble face and motionless figure—the walls, and Vaughan,

and Gabrielle, swam round Oliver Adonais. He sat down suddenly, and raising his hand with a quick motion, covered his eyes.

"Are you joking, Vaughan?" he asked, quietly.

"Joking!—not I. Gabrielle!" and he turned to her almost fiercely, "say whether I am joking or not; speak the truth."

"It is the truth, Mr. Adonais," she answered, without moving or looking towards him: and her voice was quite hard in its forced calmness.

Adonais rose. There was a dazed look in his eyes; his brows were knit together as those of a man in bodily agony; but he held up his head, and his voice was calm; harder than Gabrielle's had been.

"Yes, I congratulate you, Vaughan, of course. It *was* strange that I never heard of this before, wasn't it?"

Without another word, bowing low to the girl's still figure, Mr. Adonais passed out of the room, out at the doorway—for ever; and so on down the sun-parched thoroughfare.

A mighty steamer on the open sea. It had left the docks that morning, threading its way through the maze of masts of the misty river. Down it, always down it; past the grey walls of Tilbury Fort, onwards till the banks widened, and grew indistinct and the lonely light-ships were left in the distance. And now here it was, heaving and tossing grandly upon the open sea.

A gentleman paced the deck with long swinging strides. The sailors hurried to and fro; the captain was up on the bridge; and the other passengers loitered about, some on the seats, and some at the sides of the vessel. But this man paced on alone, his head in the air, and his brows knit well together—for he was thinking.

"Who is he, I wonder?" whispered one voice to another, as he paused for a moment beside the head of the cabin stairs.

"Hush! don't you know? A sad thing—very; and strange. No one understands it. Of course something must have happened; or he never would spoil his life in this way. A rising man he was, sir, the man of the future; but he threw it all up to go a voyage to the Antipodes: and here he is, you see."

"But *who* is he?" whispered the other again, a little impatiently.

"Bless me—don't you know?" He clutched his hat, for the wind had caught it in a gust, and would have whirled it away. "I thought everybody knew him—Adonais, Q.C."

And so a life was spoiled, and a heart was lost, and a heart was won—and the truest heart in England was broken.

And all for a pair of gloves!

FIFTY POUNDS REWARD.

BY MINNIE DOUGLAS.

I.

IT was the Christmas week, and "things" had come to the worst. When a young married clerk suddenly loses his situation in a provincial bank where employers are reducing their hands, it does not follow that work can be had for the asking in London; and so Mr. Tom Craven found himself still seeking employment many months after his savings had dwindled down to a few pounds. The last resource of the young couple was the sale of every available article of value they possessed, and when my story opens young Mrs. Craven was on the point of starting to sell the last remaining valuable—namely, her husband's boots. WICKED

"The children must live," said the young man, looking at two tiny figures in the bed; "and all my other clothes are done for, so the boots are no use to me. The only trouble is that *you* should have to take them, Clara."

"But, Tom, you can't go without boots!"

"I've got slippers," replied Tom. "Make haste, dear—no one will see you in the dark."

Resolved to keep up, Clara stooped for the boots. "Something must turn up soon—perhaps you'll hear from Brown and Co. to-morrow," she said.

"Very likely," responded Tom, in a desponding tone. Brown and Co. were his late employers, and he had written to them asking if they could possibly take him back—with faint hopes of success.

Quickly the boots were put into an old leather bag, and Mrs. Craven dressed herself in a shabby waterproof and bonnet, and covered her face with a thick veil. Then she crept down the creaking old stairs and out into the narrow street with a heavy heart, and eyes into which the tears would come. It was one of those old Westminster streets which are so close to the dwellings of the great, and yet dirty and disreputable themselves. The respectable persons dwelling there had all been reduced to the depths of poverty. The other inhabitants were chiefly remarkable for their varied vices.

Gusts of wind made the street lamps flicker and cast strange shadows as Clara Craven sped on towards the shop where "left-off" clothing was purchased. She paused a few doors off to let some persons go on their way, for she was sorely ashamed of her errand: and as she stood thus her eyes fell on a placard that was fixed under the light of a lamp on the wall of a police station.

"£50 Reward."

"Fifty pounds!—how nice to get it!" thought Mrs. Craven: and

then she took another look to see if the coast was clear for the business she had in hand. Two more people were coming. Back went her eyes to the placard, and she read that this reward was offered to any person who would give such information as would lead to the conviction of the perpetrator of a daring jewel robbery.

"Wish I could catch the thief!" said Clara to herself, half laughing, half sadly; and when she looked again towards the wardrobe shop she saw she might venture in. After hearing her husband's boots depreciated in every possible manner, she timidly accepted the pitiful price offered, and then stole back into the street. There she purchased a few of the absolute necessities of life, and ordered some coals: which a greengrocer's boy wheeled in a barrow behind her until they reached the door of the lodging-house.

"Would you mind carrying them up to my room in two basketsful, if I give you twopence?" asked Clara, gently.

The boy nodded by way of answer, and the young wife opened the door with her latch-key, and ran up for an old basket. While she was getting this out of her room a man had swiftly entered the house and passed up the stairs. The coal-boy never noticed him, for his back was turned to the door, and he was eagerly watching the signs of an approaching fight between two tom-cats on an opposite door-step. The staircase was very dark, so when Clara came down with the basket the man had squeezed himself into a corner unobserved; and when she went on her way, the stranger passed on to the top of the house, and entered the room behind that occupied by the Cravens.

An hour later a snug glow of fire warmed the young couple and their children; and the latter having been satisfied with a meal, went sound asleep. Tom watched his wife's busy fingers mending shabby clothes for awhile; and then he too went to bed, sharing her fervent hope that "something good would turn up to-morrow."

And so it came about that, when all were fast asleep, Clara sat on by the fire that still burned cheerily; and after eleven strokes had fallen slowly from the big clock, and the restless roar of traffic was somewhat less in the ever busy streets, her hands lay idle in her lap, and she blew out the candle to save its light for another time, and turned such a sad young face, such troubled blue eyes upon the flickering fire, that it seemed hard, hard so young a life should be so old in sorrow.

A sound of voices in the next room roused her. There was a door of communication between the two rooms, which was of course locked, but which made sounds easily heard. Clara knew that their neighbour was an elderly woman; she had met her on the stairs sometimes, and she wondered who her visitor could be at such an hour. Then the sound of frightened sobbing and expostulation made her listen attentively, for she feared her neighbour was in trouble, and determined to rouse her husband, if necessary.

"Not yet, Joe! Oh, don't say you must go yet!"

"Mother, I've stayed too long already. They'll be all after me sharp, now the reward's out! Think of £50, mother! The men who tempted me, and got the jewels, would round on me now and get the reward."

This was it, then! But one slight wooden door stood between Clara and the thief she had said she wished she could find! Only to step round the corner. There, she knew, was the police station, and for the news she brought them she would get £50! She clasped her hands tight, and sat perfectly still, all the while knowing that every second lessened her chance of securing this living piece of property valued at £50. In her present straits, £50 seemed a fortune to her. No one who has not gone through a similar experience can ever know what that temptation was to Mrs. Craven. As she sat, her strained ears caught the mother's voice again.

"I'll not keep you, though my heart is breaking. My bonny boy come to this! Oh, God, most merciful, save him from a felon's doom!"

"Mother, pray for me. If I escape, I vow to lead an honest life and make a home for you. It has not been my fault. Pray God to forgive and help me."

Clara's grasp of her hands relaxed. Then with white face, and sorrowful eyes, she stood up and looked at her two tiny sleeping boys. Then on her knees she fell, and stayed in earnest prayer until she heard the stealthy footsteps creep down the stairs, and the front door closed: and then she stole to the window of her darkened room, and looking out into the lamp-lit street, watched a quick walking figure in an old country woman's cloak with a deep cape, and a large poke bonnet, such as her old neighbour always wore: and she knew that the young man had escaped in his mother's clothes.

II.

ONE of the most old-fashioned houses in an old country town was Miss Greybrook's. A steep flight of immaculately clean steps led from the pavement of the High Street to her hall door with its shining brass knocker and bell-handle. On each side of this hall door was a large bow-window, just high enough to make it inconvenient for any one to offer to shake hands with Miss Greybrook when they were in the street and she was tending her flowers in the window. At the back of the broad hall that went straight across the house there were steps leading down into large, well-kept gardens, and these were enclosed by a substantial brick wall that effectually protected the fruit and flowers from pilfering fingers.

Inside the house everything was expressive of wealth and solid comfort. Miss Greybrook herself was regarded by the towns-folk as peculiar, but her peculiarity being accompanied by riches, she was never made to feel it unpleasantly. In person she was tall and angular, and a pair of piercing black eyes that shone out in vivid

contrast to her grey hair gave her a remarkable appearance. Her caps were always made high, and her dresses shorter than anybody else's, and she made no change for fashion or favour.

Now this old lady was Mr. Tom Craven's godmother. And on the very cold, dull winter morning, of which I have now to speak, she had risen from her high-backed chair in front of the bright steel fender at sound of the postman's knock, and advanced to meet the elderly servant who brought in the letters on a silver salver.

"None from him," said the old lady, when she was alone again, turning over four letters eagerly in search of a handwriting that was not there. "Poor and proud, like his father! Well, I've seen much folly in my time, but if he refuses my offer, I question if there is a companion idiot for such a man!"

It was three weeks since she had written to Tom Craven, addressing her letter to the office of Brown and Co., by whom she thought he was still employed, and offering to overlook the hideous mistake he had made in marrying a penniless orphan-girl, and to devote a substantial sum to further his prospects in life. On the very morning that she was bewailing openly her godson's pride, and secretly her own, our friend Tom received a reply to the letter he had sent to Brown and Co., politely regretting that they could do nothing further to help him; and enclosing Miss Greybrook's letter: which had been lying nearly three weeks at their office.

Clara, with the sadness of the last night's struggle still upon her, ran down the rickety stairs at sound of the postman's knock, and received the letter for her husband. When she arrived, breathless, at the top floor again, she watched his face as he opened it. The few polite lines from the business men fell unread to the ground, while the envelope they enclosed was torn eagerly open. Clara looked over his shoulder and read too, and then with one glance at the renewed light and vigour in his worn, anxious face, she relinquished her rôle of bravery, and cried out the misery of months in his arms. Bobby walked and Bertie crawled to the scene of action, and seeing their mother in tears, lent a shrill aid to the chorus. Upon which they were kissed, blessed, and cried over till they thought the world (represented to them by their father and mother) had gone mad. When partial calmness was restored, Tom spoke joyously:

"Now wife, take a shilling of your small store, and send a telegram from me to the dear old girl!"

"Tom!" cried his wife, laughing through her tears, "how disrespectful!"

But the telegram was sent, and brought in solemn wonderment to Miss Greybrook's door before ten o'clock by the postmaster himself. The yellow envelope shook in the old servant's hand, and was taken from her to tremble still more in that of Miss Greybrook. When once she had the open pink paper in front of her eyes, and devoured the information that her godson was in London, and desirous of seeing her

immediately, she gave orders for a fly to be in readiness to catch the next up train, and that her fur travelling cloak and boots should be put to the fire immediately. In the anxiety that all the domestics felt to take a share in the general excitement, Miss Greybrook's cloak threatened to be torn in pieces, and when wanted, one fur boot was found warming in front of the kitchen fire, the other reposing on the sheep-skin rug beside the drawing-room steel fender. However, vouchsafing never a word of explanation, but happily for the sanity of those she left behind, dropping the telegram in the hall as she walked out to the fly, Miss Greybrook started alone on her travels.

The dull, foggy shades of a London winter evening had gathered, and two big and two little faces were pressed tight against the grimy top windows of a house in a Westminster street, as a cab drove up.

"Go and bring her up-stairs, Clara," said Tom. "I can't go in my slippers."

"Yes—but I'm so afraid of her!"

All fears were obliged to disappear, however, for the object of them had not waited to be brought up. She had intimidated the landlady by the commanding voice in which she had desired to be shown to the apartments of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Greybrook Craven; and that fat and lazy person had preceded the strange lady rapidly up so many flights, that on reaching the top landing Miss Greybrook stood silent and stately, for she could not speak. She waved the landlady down again, just as the latter wanted to look in and see what would happen next.

Then Tom advanced, and his godmother kissed him first, then his wife. Then, observing Bobby and Bertie, she grimly smiled, and remarked aloud, but to herself, evidently:

"Children, of course!—being as poor as church mice."

Looking round the wretched room, and shaking the three chairs, she chose the least rickety, and sat down.

"Pack up—haven't got much to pack that I can see. You must all come back with me to-night."

Tom Craven and his wife exchanged glances, and at last Tom deferentially ventured to speak:

"You see, dear godmother, we—we need a few things to make us presentable at your house."

"Eh! what? My house is my own. Come as you are."

The worst must be said, then! "But—please excuse such a state of matters, but—I've got no boots!"

Miss Greybrook gasped, and stared from one to the other.

"Boots! my godson without boots? Here, Clara—that's your name, I believe—run out, child, and buy all you need for everybody: and let us get out of this place: I can't breathe."

Away ran poor Clara, holding the fat purse Miss Greybrook pushed into her hand, and all unconscious what she carried in it. It felt so full, however, that she took a cab and drove first to a boot shop where

she purchased for her husband, her children, and herself. Then came a big overcoat for Tom, and wraps for the little ones—and she told the cabman to drive home fast. She had paid for her purchases with gold, and bank notes crackled as she closed the purse.

Miss Greybrook carried out her intention, and hustled them all off to the station. The children slept all the way in the comfortable first-class carriage. It was eleven o'clock when they drove up to the door of the old lady's house, and she grimly counted five heads in nightcaps thrust out into the night air from her neighbour's windows—amongst them the Rector's, with a flannel rolled round as extra protection.

Inside the house all was done in the right way as soon as the word was given.

"My godson, his wife, and children have come to live with me. Light large fires in the two best rooms, and get supper."

III.

THREE years had passed. Tom was flourishing in a large firm in a seaport town where his godmother's money had bought him a partnership. It was only a short daily railway journey to his work, and he and his family were still happy inmates of Miss Greybrook's house. One day Clara accompanied her husband to this seaport town; and before taking leave of him at his office door, and proceeding to make the purchase which was her ostensible reason for bringing her bonnie face and fresh winter costume through the grimy streets, she waited while he went in for a book he wanted her to change.

While she was standing outside, great crowds of poor, respectable looking people came in and passed on to a large room beyond. She was told they were emigrants, just about to start for New Zealand. She watched their faces with kindly interest as young and old passed by, and presently a woman who seemed old to be thinking of such a journey dropped her purse just in front of Clara, who stooped to pick it up. In returning it she saw what made her stop the woman and eagerly question her. Yes, it was her fellow lodger in the old Westminster street, and with a face of quiet happiness she told the lady that a young son who had gone to New Zealand three years before had sent her money to join him. "He's my only one, ma'am, and was a trouble to me once, but praise God he's doing well now!"

Then Clara in gentle tones wished her well, and when her husband came back to her she reminded him of the events of that miserable night which seemed so far—so very far off from the prosperous to-day, and in a hushed and reverent tone, she said:

"Thank God, Tom, we never had that '£50 Reward!'"

THE COLONEL'S NEW YEAR.

THE Colonel sat beside the fire (you know the Colonel, grave and slim),
It used to be my wife's desire to make a match 'twixt Belle and him
When he was captain: now he's grey, and something over forty-five—
I'll back my wife to get her way with any colonel that's alive!

He told us of his sister Jane, with whom he meant to start a house;
A person elderly and plain, we fancied, duller than a mouse:
While that arch-hypocrite, my wife, cried, "How delightful!" to his plan,
"You ought to lead a charming life in town with her, you lucky man!"

Then hurriedly a question came (he coughed between and stroked the cat):
"Miss Belle?—excuse the girlish name; I always used to call her that
Before I went to India; now, of course, it would not do so well.
How is she?" Ere we told him how, in walked the all-unconscious Belle.

Dear Belle! her cheek is scarce as round as when he knew her at nineteen;
Her voice has caught a graver sound, echo of changes that have been
In these ten years; but blithe and true, her eyes lit up with pleased surprise
The voice says, "Is it really you?" "How good to see you!" say the eyes.

The Rectory children, Chris and Clem, had brought her thro' the winter lanes:
They eye the Colonel; he eyes them—nor even yet my wife explains—
(She has some plot, tho' what it be is not for feeble man to guess)—
That Belle, the belle in '73, is Belle the Rector's governess!

Sure never yet since boys began, have ever boys been so regaled
As Chris and Clem, whose inner man responds altho' their tongues have failed;
Cakes, crumpets, short-bread, with a will, my wife has plied them, nothing loth;
And if our elder guests are still, by Jove, but she can talk for both!

She talks about the Colonel's house, she talks about the Rector's cold,
She talks of Scotland and the grouse, the Curate and the village scold
Of furnishing and shades of green, of book-clubs and a fancy fair
(They can't get in one word between, I think, this most ill-treated pair!)

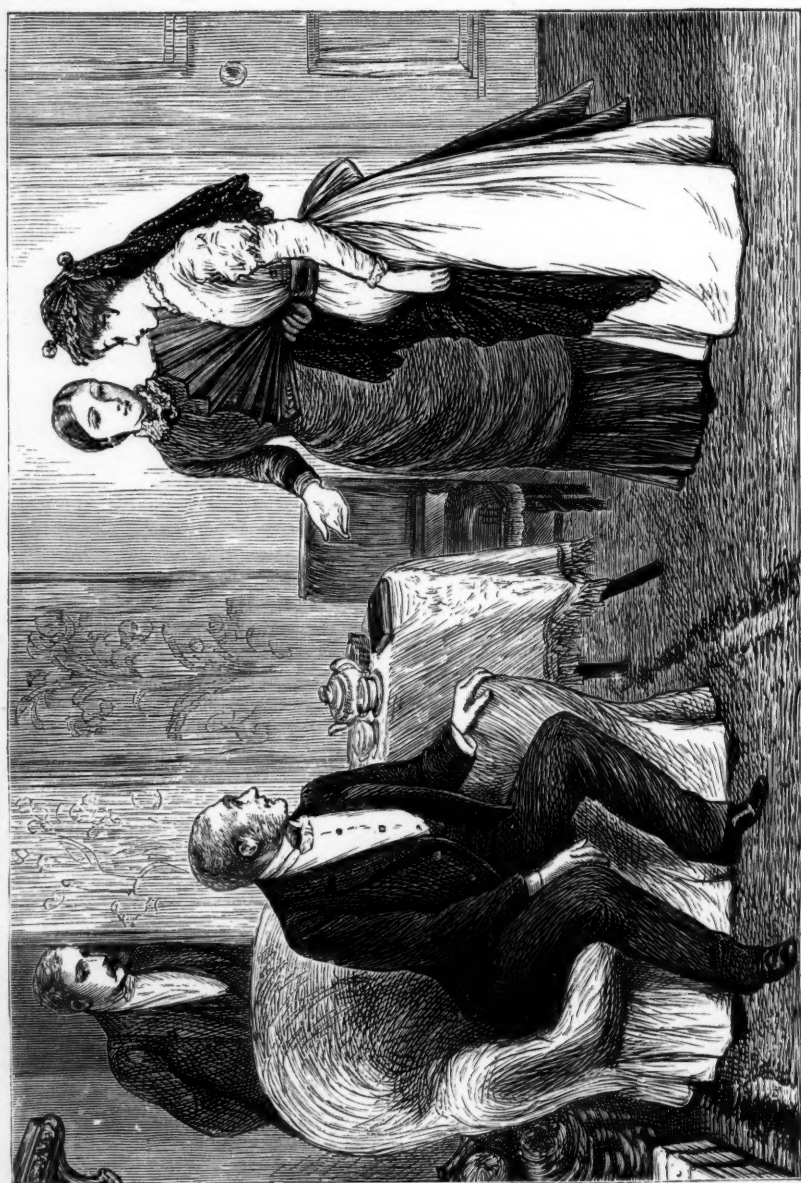
Till when at last there comes a lull, Belle rises gently from her place,
And calls her boys, and brave and full, looks up into the Colonel's face
To say good-bye: "I'm glad we've met; 'tis like a whiff of early life:
Please give, altho' we're strangers yet, your old friend's greeting to your wife!"

"My wife!" the Colonel drops her hand (they're good at blushing in Bengal!)
"I think you do not understand—my sister—not my wife at all!
But that's no matter; ere I go, I'll ask your leave to let me come
And call on you; I'd like to know my old friend's husband and her home."

Unconscious Rector! artless Jane! you little know the parts you played!
My wife begins to talk again; 'tis Belle's turn now to look dismayed.
'Belle, dear, your boys have scampered off—you'll see her, Colonel, thro' the lanes?
John, here, has such a nasty cough, and always these rheumatic pains."

My wife and I, we sat an hour, our guest came whistling thro' the hall,
He held a Christmas rose, the flower that blooms against the Rectory wall.
My wife looked up and met his eyes, I think she did not care to speak,
But rising, to my great surprise, on tip-toe, kissed the Colonel's cheek!

G. B. STUART.



M. ELLEN STAPLES.

PLACING A FAN IN ELSPETH'S OBEDIENT HAND. MRS. MAYNE LED HER FORWARD.

R. AND E. TAYLOR.